MS 3518

ORAL HISTORY

HELENE POWELL

Readers: Please sign [illegible] on third page of this volume.

California Historical Society

Women in California Collection

COPYRIGHT - 1978

CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

Oral History of

Helene Powell

Table of Contents

Literary Property Rights

Statistical Information

Interview History

Reprints from Life Magazine, May 16, 1938

Reprints of Newspaper Photographs

Copy of Official Sample Ballot - Union Election

Organizational Leaflets

Text of Radio Program Sponsored by Warehouse Union

Speech given by Helene Powell in commemoration of Negro History Week

Transcript

Index

STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON HELENE POWELL
(for CHS Women in California Collection) Oral History Interview

Name Helene Powell When born April 17, 1919

Where born San Jose, Calif.

How long lived at place of birth 17 years

When moved to San Francisco 1936

Names of parents and grandparents

Mother (maiden name) Alma Graves

Where born San Francisco, Calif. Date of birth Dec. 9, 1896

Father's name William Powell

Where born Alameda, Calif. Date of birth April 27, 1896

Grandparents

Mother's side:

Name of father Thomas Graves

Where born Virginia

Name of mother Daisy Duprez

Where born Louisiana

Father's side:

Name of father William Powell

Where born Louisiana

Name of mother Lucinda Braxton

Where born Montreal, Canada

Bfothers and Sisters

| Name | Date of birth | Death? |
|---|---|---|
| Evelyn | 1921 | |
| | | |
| | | |

## Interview History

Oral History of HELENE POWELL

Born: April 17, 1919 in San Jose, California

Interviews held on: October 30, November 6, November 20, 1976, and on January 15 and January 29, 1977

Interviewer: Lucy Kendall

Time of Interview: Approximately ten hours

Helene Powell has been interviewed as one of the women trade union activists of the early 1940's, the World War II years. This is one of a series being conducted by the CHS Library for its Women in California Collection. This section of the collection, when concluded, will consist of a number of interviews with both women trade unionists and left wing women of the 1930's and 1940's, a period when a number of women came forward in their unions and organizations.

## Conduct of the Interview

When Ms. Powell was approached about the interviews, she was very amiable and willing. She, however, evinced no special interest in her past life, and evidently did not feel she had contributed in any unusual way to women's history. She has kept few records of her past activities.

The interviews were held at her home in San Francisco which she inherited from her parents. She has lived in this house, except for brief periods of time, since she first moved to San Francisco with her family when she was seventeen. It is a tidy six room house with a large back yard. The home is that of a student and a person of varied interests. It is over run with books, records, magazines and periodicals.

## Narrative Account of the Interview

Ms. Powell talks of her childhood in San Jose, her home life and the large family gatherings that took place. The impression given is that she lived a rather sheltered life as a young Black girl in what was then a small community.

College opened up a whole new world to her. She became a joiner and a leader. Was President of the Negro Students Union for two years. She became active and interested in anti-war movements, among other things, and was in the last graduating class before World War II.

Upon graduation she took advantage of a college initiated connection with the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, Local 6, and obtained a job in a coffee warehouse. She was immediately involved in a short strike.

The Interview continues with a detailed narration of her union life; her function as an organizer in Los Angeles for the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union for two years, and her being fired for "interfering with the business of a Local". She then returned to San Francisco, became active in Local 6, was a Steward on several jobs, active in union sports and other union functions. She became a member of the local's Executive Board. She did not leave the union until jobs became so scarce she was unable to earn a living.

A comparison between Local 6 and, say, shipyard or machinists unions would be interesting, as Ms. Powell brings out a feeling of real democracy within the Local and the running of the local. Although women were not accorded equality in the matter of pay,and the leadership was basically male, still steps forward were being made. The difference here may be that women were in the local before the war. An explanation of the difference between "men's" and "Women's" is given.

## The Interviewee

Ms. Powell's friends speak of her as one of the kindest and most considerate women they know. She is very reticent about herself - a really private person. She is 57 years of age, active in sports, interested in social welfare and in languages. She teaches languages at a high school in the East Bay. Many of her vacations are spent in Europe, and she often attends school in France during the summer.

## Editing

At the end of each interview, the interviewer typed the transcript and presented a copy to Ms. Powell for correction. No corrections were made. Therefore the following transcript is an almost word-for-word copy of the tape with no deletions or corrections except for possible occasional errors on the part of the transcriber.

The interview was conducted in the general pattern of the series, i.e. her childhood, schooling, first working experiences, etc. The questions were pursued from a feminist viewpoint as well as an attempt to discover the motivating factors in her early life which may have contributed toward her interests in social change.

At the conclusion of the interview Ms. Powell talked a little more about her family, and brought out (unfortunately not on the tape) her strong sense of family and their influence on her life. The family was an extended one - never needed baby sitters - always a member of the family took charge in any time of need. If money was needed, it was immediately forthcoming with no question of repaying being brought up. She said, "None of us ever felt alone or unloved."

Lucy Kendall
March, 1978

INDEX

Helene Powell Interview


| | |
|---|---|
| Aero Reclamation Company | 92,94,101,110 |
| Alaska | |
| Gold Rush | 2 |
| Exploration | 16 |
| Alexander Balart Coffee Co. | 50,64,65 |
| Atom Bomb | 129,130 |
| Beavers, Louise | 101,106 |
| Bonus March | 8 |
| Bridges, Harry | 103,108,128 |
| Bushnell's Photography Service | 2,8,37 |
| California Youth Legislature | 46 |
| Cannery Workers | 27,28 |
| Catholic Church | 11,12,13,18,27,33,54 |
| Cayton, Revels | 89,90,95,106,109,150,151,163 |
| Coffin Redington Drug Co. | 115-117 |
| Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) | 88,89,91,104,108,113 |
| Committee for Peace | 46 -48 |
| Crawford, Matt | 40 |
| Depression (1920's) | 5,19,20 |
| Dies, Martin (Committee) | 47 |
| End Poverty in California (EPIC) | 40 |
| Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) | 157,158,160,161 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Fair Bear | 51 |
| Flue Epidemic, World War I | 3 |
| Goldblatt, Lou | 89,91 |
| Gold Rush, Alaska | 2 |
| Hart Lynching | 28-30 |
| Hartsook's Photography Studio | 2,3,37 |
| Hawes, Elizabeth | 111 |
| Hawkins, Augustus | 96,106 |
| Hitler,Adolph | 20,48,123 |
| House Unamerican Activities Committee (HUAC) | 47 |
| Hubbard, Father (Alaskan Explorer) | 16 |
| I.L.W.U. (see Warehouse Union) | |
| Independent Paper Co. | 80,81 |
| Keesling, Mabel | 136,155 |
| Mangrum, Holbrook & Elkus | 118,127,141 |
| Minorities | |
| Blacks | |
| As Waiters | 6 |
| In Neighborhoods | 10,26,53 |
| Slavery | 22,23 |
| In Small Towns | 25,37 |
| Discrimination | 26,27,30,61,62,130,131,156 |
| Students Clubs | 46 passim |
| Sororities | 58 |
| Housing | 60 |
| World War II jobs | 63 |
| In Unions & on jobs | 75,92,93,125,126,134,136,137, 156,157 |
| In armed forces, WWII | 97 |
| Living Conditions & Housing | 103,111 |
| In politics | 107 |
| March on Washington, WWII | 112 |

Minorities
Asians 75
Mexican Americans 75,109
Japanese 75,76,130

National Youth Administration(NYA) 45,64

Negro Students Club 46,48,49,52

Paton, Eugene 89,90,91

Peace Movements (on campus) 48

Pearl Harbor 69,70

Powell, Helene
Parents & Grandparents 1-11
Religious training 11-13
Cultural and family life, friends 14-18,22,30,31
Education 19,20
Community life 27
Chores, earning money 31
Plans for future 32,33
High School 35,36
Preparation for womanhood 35,36
Move to San Francisco 37,38
High School in San Francisco 38,39
Social life 39,58,59
Role Models 39,40,42
Cultural and Political Development 40,41
College, jobs, friends, clubs 43-52
First full time job 50,64,67,68
First strike 66,69
Reaction to Pearl Harbor 70
Opinions on War 70,71
In Union Activities 74
Opinions on Concentration Camps 75,76
As Stewardess in Union 76,78,82-84,86,87
At Schenley Distillers Co. 116,117
Relations with men on job 88
As International Representative of ILWU in Los Angeles 92-94
Living in Los Angeles 95
World War II activities 96,97
Organizing during war 98,106,109,110
Political Action Work 106-108
Leaving Organizing Job 108 passim
Job with CIO 113,114
Return to San Francisco and job with Coffin Redington 115

Powell, Helene (continued)
Continued union activity 119
Involvement in Sports Program 120-122
Political activities 122-124
Member of Executive Board 125
Opinion of Atom Bomb 129-131
Disagreement with Union Officers 135
Leaving Warehouse Industry 146
Reflections on Union Activities 147-149
Opinions on Marriage 150-151
Concluding reminiscences and Opinions 152-155

Prohibition 43

Race Discrimination
Blacks 26,30,61,62,130,131,134,136, 137
Mexicans 27
Filipinos 27
Japanese 130,75,76

Randolph, A. Phillip 112

Rent Control (World War II) 122,124

San Jose 10,25,27,33,37,38

Schwabacher Frey 85-87

Schenleys Distillers Co. 67,77,80

Scottsboro Case 23,24,57

Sears Roebuck Strike 144

Slavery 22,23

Spanish Civil War 39,41,42

Strikes
Local 6, ILWU 66,145
San Francisco General Strike 39
Sears Roebuck 144
Longshore 141

Student Workers Federation 45,46,50,51

Taft-Hartley Law 143

Truman, Harry 130

United Automobile Workers 91

United Nations 129

Veterans World War I 8

Vigilante Action 28-30

Wallace, Henry 145

War Labor Board 98

Warehouse Union, Local 6 ILWU (San Francisco) 66-69,72-74,77,79,80,81,84 85,86,115

Warehouse Union, Local 26 ILWU (Los Angeles) 90-92,97,98,101,103,108,110, 119,126,127,128,143,144,145

Women
- Birth Control 3
- Abortion 12,13
- In Cannery Work 27,28
- Sex Education 34,35
- Minority Women in Sororities 58
- Housing,on campus jobs 60,63
- Unions (including discrimination against) 66,67,69,72-75,92,93,113,115,118, 119,126,127,135-142,146,147, 154,156,157,159

Job Descriptions (including "men's" and "women's" jobs) 78,80,81,85,86,92

Wage Differential 66,69,126,128,148

In Union Auxiliaries 84

In War Jobs 99,102,110,131,132

Liberation Movement 157,158,159-161

As Organizers 99,100,103,104

Post War Projections 111,112

Equal Pay for Equal Work 113,115,118,119,137,138-142

In Sports 120-122, 74

Unmarried Women 149

Woolworth's 118,131,137,140,141

World War II 76,79,90,96-98,122,123,130, 131,132,155

Interview with Helene Powell
Date of Interview: Saturday, October 30th, 1976
1466 - 21st Ave. SF
Interviewer: Lucy Kendall
Transcriber: Lucy Kendall
Begin: Tape 1 - page One

Lucy Kendall: Today is Saturday, October 30, 1976, and we are having our first interview with Helene Powell for the Women in California Collection of the California Historical Society.

Well, Helene, you are going to fill out the outline on your background so we won't have to go into that, but I would like to know how your parents met.

Helene Powell: They met as very young people.

Kendall: Where?

Powell: It would have been in San Francisco. They were both living in San Francisco as young people and I remember seeing in Congress Springs near San Jose a heart carved on a tree with their names that they had put there years and years before which my sister and I saw when we used to go picnicing there.

Kendall: Did they get married immediately after they met?

Powell: No. They knew each other as young people, eleven, thirteen, that age, and then they probably were in their early twenties when they got married.

Kendall=: Do you remember your grandparents at all?

Powell: Well, the only grandparent I remember is my father's mother, who died when I was ten. My mother's mother died when my mother was seven, and her father died right after I was born. He had seen me, but I don't remember him at all. My father's father had died when my father was a young man. He had gotten married. Then my father's mother had re-married, so that grandfather I remember rather well.

Kendall: What do you remember about him?

Powell: He was a kindly old man. The whole family - well not the whole family but certain parts of that family on my father's side had had an interest in the gold mine

POwell cont.) rush in Alaska, so many of them had gone there thinking they were going to make a fortune. They never made anything. And he was sort of the last of this group. He was never going to give up on Alaska and possibly finding a gold strike. So he would talk about Alaska and panning and that kind of lore which was exciting to youngsters at that time. He was a very kind man. He had false teeth so he was always eating gumdrops. I remember that. But he would up again, after my grandmother died, to Alaska. Never made it, and died there. His cabin caught on fire and he was burned in his cabin.

Kendall Was that the Fraser River gold rush, or another gold rush? That was in Canada?

Powell I don't know. It was in Fairbanks and Nome, but whatever the name of it was, I don't know. And he did have some small pieces of gold nuggets made into jewelry. They were lovely. But it was quite a tradition on that side of the family. But nobody ever made it.

Kendall What was your father's occupation?

Powell Mailcarrier.

Kendall Did he enjoy that kind of work?

Powell Yes. I think he did. He was totally unskilled. Graduated from the eighth grade and that was the end of his formal education, and originally was a night watchman in San Jose, took the exams for a postal carrier and became a postal carrier.

Kendall What about your mother? Did she work?

Powell Yes. She worked for, first, Hartsook's photography studio in San Francisco. Then later in San Jose at Bushnell's photography studio. In those days Hartsook was the big name in photography. Photography was still a new science and all of the Hollywood movie stars in those days always would come to Hartsook's in San Francisco to have him make their photographs. And my mother went to work there very young. And he was unusually nice to all of his employees, bought

POWELL - them dinner tickets, paid for trips to places like Yosemite, which were long trips in those days, and he made photography an _____. Unfortunately he was a chronic alcoholic and lost everything.

So after my sister and I were born mother did take time off then, and then she went back to work and she worked all the time, until many years later.

Kendall Were you children planned, both of you?

POWELL I would presume so.

Kendall Your mother was knowledgeable about birth control?

Powell I would make that presumption because there were only two and we were twenty two months apart, which is considered well spaced, and that was the end.

Kendall Was your mother's education better than your fathers?

Powell Yes. She had finished three years in high school and continually went to adult school at night, mainly for fun things: french courses, spanish courses, and always books, and classics as a rule. They were more or less her reading material. The house was always full of good books. Even as children we were directed to books very early on.

Kendall= Was your father interested in books too?

Powell No. He was more a newspaper man.

Kendall What was the house like? Did your mother have help when you were young?

Powell Oh, no, no, no, never.

Kendall What was the house furnished like, how many rooms?

Powell First of all, I was born in my great aunt's house, which was a huge place, and I was born there because there was a flue epedemic. Hospitals were just loaded with flue patients. The corridors were strwen with oots for patients. There was no room in the hospital for women giving birth that year. So I was born ib my great aunt's house which was a huge house. I don't know how many rooms that place had - about twelve rooms. Then shortly after that my parents bought this four room house

POWELL which was two bedrooms, a living room, and a kitchen. And there was never any help. My great aunt in that sense years later could be considered a baby sitter because when my parents were going out they would take us over there to spend the night there, and they would pick us up in the morning.

Kendall I want to go back a minute. This is the question I was trying to think of. Your parents met in San Francisco and then moved to San Jose?

Powell Right.

Kendall When they got married did they move to San Jose?

Powell No. It was later.

Kendall Why did they move to San Jose ?

Powell It might have been the job situation. I really don't know the reason for the move to San Jose. I know all they ever talked about my whole youth was when we were moving back to San Francisco.

Kendall They were originally San Franciscans then?

Powell My mother was born in San Francisco. My father was born in Alameda. But shortly after his birth his family also moved to San Francisco. They lived their young adolescent and even into their twenties, that part of their life, in San Francisco.

Kendall I see. Then were you born in San Jose, and your sister also?

Powell Yes.

Kendall And how long did you live there?

Powell I lived there until I was 17 years old.

Kendall What else was your mother like, in addition to being a photographer?

Powell My mother wasn't a photographer. She was the salesperson in the studio, the clerk, she would suggest different photos. This kind of thing.

Kendall I forgot to ask this too. Was your mother's ethnic background different from your father's.

Powell No.

Kendall They originally came from where?

Powell They both were black and it is very difficult to

Powell go back. My mother's father was born in North Carolina. My mother's mother was probably born in Louisiana because her maiden name was French. My father's mother was born in Canada, and that probably was the result of the underground railroad. And my father's father also was born in Louisiana.

Kendall We'll get back to your mother now. What kind of a person was she?

Powell Unique. Absolutely unique. One of the rare people.

Kendall In what ways?

Powell It's hard to describe. She was a very quiet person and very kind. It is very very difficult to describe her, but you do not meet people like her.

Kendall What was your father like, then?

Powell My father was a really nice guy, and he also had a streak of generosity, but in a different way. Again, this was in the days of the depression and I am sure there was some kind of a hobo sign on our house because whenever they would come by father would have them chop some wood. Then they would come in the house and have dinner. And this happened all the time. Mother did not like it because she did not think hobos should come in the house with little girls. But she put up with it. And my father just had that reputation. He literally would give the shirt off his back to somebody, and he was always doing this. And the panhandlers always got something from my father, always.

Kendall Which one of them would you say influence you most in your life?

Powell My mother because of this whole interest in books. This not only came from my mother. My aunt was involved, her sister who lived in Berkeley. But from a very early age I was always given very good children's books to read. My mother was a big influence.

Kendall Did she have any particular plans for you?

Powell Well, they sort of evolved. I really loved learning, and so I always wanted to go to college and this was always part of our conversation so that it just became, "when you go to college". And I just knew from a very early age that I was going to go to college. The family knew I was going to go to college. Nobody was pushing me into it.

With my sister it was just the opposite. She hated school, and made a compromise with my mother that she would go to a community college for two years if she could get off the hook. And that is what she did.

Kendall What about your aunt?

Powell Another great person. They (my mother and she) were sisters, and there was something about that family that was unique. They had a a background that was just terrible. Oh gosh, in their family there must have been seven or eight children and they all died because of malnutrition. Of course my mother's mother had died at _____. Her father, whom I don't remember because I was a baby and he died at that time, was a waiter for years and years at the Palace where they only had black waiters. And there was no way he could take care of these children alone. So they would be farmed out to different people's homes, some of whom were nice people and some of whom were horrible people who just wanted cheap child labor or something like that. Fortunately my mother wound up, and that is possibly how they met, with my father's great aunt who was very, very nice to her. Eventually she wound up there. Before that she just went from home to home. In eight years of what they called in those days grammar school she had been in twelve different homes. Her sister, my aunt, had also been in different homes, private families who knew my grandfather. And she finally wound up with a wonderful woman. By that time she was fifteen or sixteen.

Powell So that they never had this real home life. My grandfather was always very interested in them. They just adored him. They just adored that man, and he adored them. It was really a terrible economic basis. My mother didn't find out until she was in her forties that she had had rheumatic fever as a youngster. In those days for people who were poor there were no doctors, absolutely nothing. It was just a disgusting time.

Kendall When was that - about 1870?

Powell Oh no. This was much later. It was the 1890's and early 1900's. Terrible.

Kendall Is this the grandfather you knew?

Powell The grabdfather I knew was not my grandfather by blood. He was my grandmother's second husband.

Kendall I see. I get your genealogy a little mixed up. Did your mother do the cooking in the house, or did your mother and father share things?

Powell It was really unique. You see my father was the mail carrier. He got off work about three in the afternoon. My mother would get home at 5:30 to 6 at night. Dinner would be on the table. My father did all the cooking on work days.

Kendall Then they did sort of share?

Powell Yes. That was his big role there. The other things he didn't do. He did what might be called man's work. This place was a tiny house, but a huge lot. It was about 50 by 300 feet. We had a big chicken yard, all kinds of fruit trees. That was another thing, oh god. We had so much fruit which my mother would put up. She always did the canning for the winter. Then we would even have a surplus of that. On Sunday we would get in that car. There was no Bayshore or anything else then. It was El Camino Real. Those cars couldn't go as fast as they go now.. We would come up to San Francisco and go to all these old people( they were private homes) that my mother and father knew. We would leave a lug of apricates here, and figs there, and these elderly

Powell people were having the worst time just ekeing out a living and they would be so glad not only for the fruit but for the visit. I have all these memories that just go all the way back.

Kendall What kind of a neighborhood was it you lived in?

Powell I would call it a workingclass neighborhood. Everybody was in the same boat. I had a playmate and her father drove a truck for a laundry company, and they had a terrible time financially. He was one of the veterans that went to Washington on that march where Hoover - the Bonus March. It was a workingclass neighborhood.

Kendall Were there many black families in San Jose in that period?

Powell There were a handfull.

Kendall Did you remember anything about the Bonus March. Did they talk about it at all?

Powell Not my parents so much. I remember a great deal from my playmate's father - before it occured and afterwards. Afterwards there was some kind of a bonus they received. I think this man got about $500. and he was able to buy a house and have it moved to the front of his lot, and they put it up and lived there.

Kendall= What were your finances like - adequate or what?

Powell We never had to go on relief. During the depression where my mother worked (at that time it was Bushnell's) there was one other woman who worked there also, and she was a single woman supporting her mother, and she had greater seniority than my mother, so she worked most of the time, and my mother was given what they called in those days a furlough, so that she rarely worked in those years of the depression right after the crash in 1929. Now, with my father being a mail carrier hex was a federal employee, and the government furloughed all their employees just about This affected mail carriers also. What that meant was that they worked less time than they normally would work xxx in the calendar

Powell year so that finances would be reduced to that degree. My mother was bringing in practically no income them, and my father's income would be reduced. But my mother was a great manager, a fantastic manager, and ends met. We never felt deprived. We certainly never felt rich or anything like that, but we always got along. Somehow my mother was like that mother in the movies, "I Remember Mama." There the joke was whenever a problem came up the mother would say, "Don't worry, there is always mama's bank account." There wasn't any bank account. My mother didn't use that, but something about her presence and her excellence in management-we always felt secure.

Kendall Were they interested in politics at all?

Powell No, really. They were very strong Democrats. They voted for Al Smith. They had voted for Woodrow Wilson. They were very much against Herbert Hoover, then voted for Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1932 election. But that was the extent of their politics.

Kendall Did they discuss it much at home?

Powell Oh, always the elections. The presidential elections were always big topics of discussion, and how it was going to go, and all that sort of thing, and the children were involved.

Kendall What other things did you discuss around the dinner table or whatever?

Powell Around the dinner table it would be pretty much small talk. They both had had a smattering of - well first there was - they probably wanted to say things that they didn't want us to know what they were talking about. So first sometimes they would spell things, but once I learned how to spell they couldn't do that anymore. And then they had both picked up some Spanish, but not very much. So then they would use occasionally Spanish words if they wanted to say something that they didn't want us to know about or what the topic of discussion was. And they were very strict with us as far as our not telling neighbors anything

Powell about our private lives. They didn't want any of these gossips bearing tales or taking advantage of children and finding out what was going on in the family, or anything of that nature. So our table talk really was small chit-chat.

Kendall This question of not wanting your neighbors to know - were all your neighbors white neighbors?

Powell Oh, these were all white neighbors.

Kendall You think that was the reason?

Powell Oh, I don't know. San Jose was peculiar at that time. For instance my great aunt lived on a beautiful street. She is the one in whose house I was born. And some distance apart on that lot there were two black families. And the relationship that my great aunt had her entire life, until she died a few years ago at 85, with her neighbors was the most wholesome, beautiful relationship. Everyone adored her, and my great uncle at that time, but he had died earlier. Everyone just got along beautifully. When you hear some of these tales about this country it was a unique situation again. So there were pockets like that throughout San Jose, although there was a very tiny, what is now called ghetto, but very small.

No, you just encounter in some neighborhoods some women usually, unfortunately, who evidently don't have anything to do except to carry tales, and our next door neighbor was like that. She did it with everybody in the block. The tales would get distorted. She pumped children. She was noted for this, and even here in San Francisco I have a neighbor who doesn't do that at all, but it's the same thing. She knows every single thing about every single person on the entire block. These usually are women who have never worked and don't have much to do after the housework is finished, and I don't know but I think this was involved. This neighbor did have this reputation with everyone.

Kendall What about religion?

Powell Oh well, religion. This is a funny story.

Kendall We were talking about religion.

Powell Religion. That's a funny one.

Kendall OK, let's hear it.

Powell Both parents believed in god. We were taught the prayer, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep, and if I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. God bless mama, God bless daddy. God bless auntie. God bless grannie. God bless Nana," etc. etc. etc. But my mother said that we would never be baptised until we became adults because she wanted us to make up our own minds whether we wanted a religion or no religion. My parents never went to church. There was a Mary Baker Eddy book on the table. My great aunt was interested in Christian Science. My mother was to a lesser degree. She was never involved in it whatsoever except that I was always aware that this book was there. But what happened was that when my mother decided that she was going back to work, that we were old enough now, we went to a day nursery. I was four years old and my sister was two years old. And this was a day nursery that was operated by the Sisters of the Holy Family, so it was Catholic. And then my father would pick us up there after he got off work and take us home. My mother would walk us there in the mornings before she went to work. And it was a very nice place. We had our meals there - our big luncheon meal, a morning snack, an afternoon snack. For little ones they would have an afternoon nap. There was a large playground, and this kind of thing. When it became time to start elementary school, because of the distance (it was very close) we went to a Catholic elementary school, St. Joseph's, where religion was one of the courses offered. And it was taught in a spelling bee. So in my class I was what was called the pagan. I was the only pagan, and I was always the first in the line. No one could ever displace me from being first place. All the Catholics

Powell (laughter) could never make me miss a question and get ahead of me in that spelling class. This was a religious spelling bee. Well anyway indirectly - when I look back I can see that this was all part of the process - I was getting very interested in this Catholic religion. So every time I would broach it to my mother she would say, "No, no, no. Remember what I told you. I don't want you to become a part of any religion until you are eighteen and can make up your own mind which religion you want to go into." So I let it ride. Then when I was about seven or eight I started to take piano lessons from a private teacher and she was involved in the First Presbyterian church. And she said to my mother, "You know it would be nice if the girls at least went to Sunday School." I guess it was considered terrible in those days that children were not involved in some kind of a denominational religion. So my mother thought, well Sunday School wouldn't be too bad - no baptisim or anything, we would just be going to Sunday School. So then I started going to the First Presbyterian Church Sunday School. It consisted mainly of coloring pictures of angels and this kind of thing. Then later on a wonderful Irish priest would be at school, and he did these magic tricks. He had a captive audience. And I just loved these magic tricks. So he would talk about the Catholic church and I would go to my mother and say I really think I wanted to become a Catholic, and "no, no, no, no, no." So finally she did give in. She could't take it any longer, and she let my sister and me be baptised catholics. So I was a Catholic until I went to Cal. But I was beginning to see certain things that I didn't like in the Catholic church. And when I went to Cal. they had the Neuman Club there which is organized by the Catholic church, and I went to one of the lectures there, and after the lecture you have an opportunity to ask questions. And I asked about abortion in the sense of, if a

Powell woman were raped and got pregnant - would she be able to have an abortion in the Catholic church, and they said absolutely not. So that really made me start to think more and more about this Catholic church. So then I was going to go to Mexico in 1940, and they had the Bancroft Library there which is probably the best in the United States in Latin American history. So I would go up there every day and read, and the more I read about what the Catholic church had done in Mexico, I finally just threw in the towel and never went to mass again. And this upset my mother very much although she wasn't a Catholic. She just thought I had made a commitment and that I wasn't sticking with it. I told her all my reasons and that sort of thing. So that's where I am right now - no religion.

Kendall Did the church influence you when you were a child in any way - your life?

Powell Oh, I don't think so. In the sense that I was (even though my parents didn't go to church and that sort of thing) always surrounded by a christian background, and it has influence me to that degree, that I am very conversant with christianity. I know all the bible stories. I have been into the bible. I really am knowledgeable that way, and it has been good for me because we live in a christian country and a christian civilization and I am very glad that I have that in my background because it enables me to understand many many things that go on in that sense possibly. But in anything specifically, no. All these other things, you know, that the church is supposed to do, and where things are so horrible today in this country with lack of morality, lack of ethics and all that, I really got from my parents and it had nothing to do with the church. This business of not lying, of not cheating, of not stealing. That came to me from my parents - all of it.

Kendall You had the Mary Baker Eddy book on the table. Did you also have the bible?

Powell Oh, yes. Always. The bible. I still have it right here.

Kendall Did they read the bible?

Powell No. What they used the bible for was very common in those days. It was to record important dates on the front page, when everybody was born and this kind of thing.

Kendall Fine, and you have it here?

Powell Yes, but I don't know if the page is there, but I have it.

Kendall If it is, I will xerox it. We put the cart before the horse here. You were the oldest, and your sister was how many years behind you?

Powell Two years.

Kendall Oh yes, you told me. How did you get along with her?

Powell We didn't get along. As youngsters we were different. We had different playmates. On those occasions where we had to be together with no other children around we got along beautifully because we were both making the best of it. We both liked to play. But as youngsters we did not get along. As young adolescents, teenagers, then a real relationship began to develop. As adults we have an excellent relationship. We get along very, very well. But as little children we did not get along well. In the beginning I was her protector. In that sense I always took care of her in that no one could ever hit her or hurt her or harm her, and she knew that I would take care of her. But we didn't get along. Our interests weren't the same when we were little.

Kendall In your family life, did the family get along well together?

Powell Oh, yes. Everything was family in those days. We did everything together. Certain things, like plays in San Francisco, that I really would have liked to have seen as a young girl, but my father wasn't interested in them. But my playmate's mother and my mother would come up to them. And she would say, "no, no, they are too deep for you."

Powell Then my father would (in those days bowling was for men only) he would go bowling maybe once a week with a male friend, or to a prize fight with a male friend. Other than that everything was family. We would go to Santa Cruz with a big picnic lunch on a Sunday, or go to Big Basin with a picnic lunch and spend the day. Every single thing was family.

Kendall What other things did you do outside of that? Did you go to movies. There were movies then, of course. What was your cultural life like with your mother?

Powell There wasn't too much cultural life, really. As children Saturday mornings there was one theatre that had children's matinees. There was a Mickey Mouse Club. And theoretically the matinee was run for the Mickey Mouse Club of which we were members. Probably it cost a dime to be in it, and the admission to the theatre was a dime. These were great pictures, some of them - the Jackie Coogan films, Charlie Chaplain, Jackie Cooper. And then there was a horrible serial where you had to get back the next week to see what was going to happen. So that was our Saturday morning as a rule, and we would go alone. With my mother and father now, although they might have these few nights out during the month not together. It would be my mother with this playmate's mother, and that would be rare, maybe once every two or three months there would be a play in San Francisco that they would come to. My father would be out a little more frequebtly for a prize fight if there were a good one, or bowling. Other than that we would go to my great aunt's a great deal for dinners where there would be many, many people. Or they would come over to our house. The rule was then that children would be seen and not heard. There there would be fabulous discussions, and the rule was just so we never opened our mouths after dinner and all that we could stay up as long as we wanted and listen. So I just loved that. All

Powell grown up talk. And there they talked about everything - the world, the United States, politics, jobs. It was really adult conversation, and I just loved it. But nothing on a cultural level in the sense of literature or anything of that nature. The literature only came from my mother and my aunt and some other family friends, but not from these big family get-togethers.

Kendall= Did the whole family believe like your mother and father in a democratic set up - Jeffersonian Democrats?

Powell= Oh yes. Everybody.

Kendall Did your mother drive a car?

Powell No. Unfortunately the first lesson she took my father made the mistake of putting the two children in the back seat. And I don't know what happened but my mother temporarily lost control of the car. There was gravel and she hit a culvert, and it absolutely was nothing. But my sister and I being so tiny just thought it was horrible and started crying, screaming and all that. So unfortunately that was the last time my mother ever took a driving lesson. Today would be different because they have these driving schools, but there wasn't any such thing then.

Kendall I was thinking of it from the point of view of her being more of a free woman. Was she more than most women?

Powell I would say, she was quite a free woman. In the first place because she worked and the field, although limited, opened up for her. University of Santa Clara was there. They had all their graduation pictures taken there. She knew Father Hubbard, the great explorer in Alaska, very very well. They were very good friends. And many many of the professors at the University of Santa Clara she knew through the years because of their contact with the studio. Then she was a free-thinker in the sense that women were not supposed to work in those days, particularly mothers. And she did, and worked successfully and kept a home successfully. So in that sense even

Bowell some of the things like going to a play was unheard of then for someone in those circumstances.

Kendall Did she ever discuss with you any interest in the women's right to vote, in that campaign. I know you were born in 1929 -

Powell No, I was born in 1919.

Kendall I mean 1919 rather, the year that women got

Powell That was the year that women got the vote. No. No. And she would be aware of it, but I don't recall anything or specific conversations on that

Kendall Did your family ever have enough money to go on vacations away from home together?

Powell Not all the time together. I won't say that. And I always look back upon that with a great deal of oh desire that they did it. It certainly tuned me in to vacations in my adult life. Well, where did we go together - we always went to Santa Cruz because it was the closest place. Again my mother would find out some place that would be very, very cheap. We stayed at one place for several years. We would stay about two weeks, and it would be an old beat up house on the top of a hill. We would walk about a mile to the beach. And we would bring our picnic lunch with us. Everything was provided. So we just stayed there the whole day. My mother didn't even swim. And then on the beach we would meet other kids and play and swim all day long, and we just loved it. We would look forward to that every year to go to the beach at Santa Cruz.

Kendall Did you ever go anyplace else?

Powell No. A few side trips possibly. Not with the family as a group. When I was in the third grade the Olympics were being held in Los Angeles and my father and his mother, my grandmother, and I drove down to Los Angeles at that time. And I didn't go to the Olympics. I stayed with other friends. So that was one trip. Occasionally with my playmate I would go to Big Basin. Her family preferred the mountains. They were campers. But that was it.

Powell San Francisco was constantly visited, but not on a trip. We would stay Saturday night and go home Sunday. Vacations were always at Santa Cruz period.

Kendall I think we have time to get into your schooling a little bit. Tell me about your schooling. You told me a little bit about your going to the Catholic school, but let's go on from there. Your first schooling, what was it like?

Powell The elementary school?

Kendall Yes.

Powell Well, it was good. I certainly have been fortunate enough wherever I have gone in my educational life the educational program has been excellent. I always have been well motivated too. I will say that because I always took advantage of whatever was offered. And there the composition was basically workingclass again. A few wealthy students, but primarily these were children of Catholic working parents. Many of the mothers worked in laundries which was very, very, very hard work, and low paid. Then from there I went to Notre Dame High School in San Jose.

Kendall Was that a private school?

Powell Yes. A high school. And again the education was just excellent.

Kendall Did your parents have to pay for that?

Powell Yes. They paid. In those days it was nominal. I think it was about $5. a month. And then, with two in the family, there would be a reduction. Instead of $10. - $5. each, it would be $7.50. And this could also be negotiated. And when times would be difficult financially my mother would negotiate and get a lower rate.

Kendall Were you about 14 when you started high school?

Powell Yes.

Kendall That was about the time of the real depression, the bank holiday. Do you remember anything about the bank holiday?

Powell Oh, yes. I remember so much. I remember in the

Powell first place with my father's check. I remember him being paid in gold on pay day.

Kendall Oh, for goodness sakes.

Powell Yes, right. Then the bank holiday, I remember that and of course gold went out of the picture totally. And San Jose was terrible in those times. I guess it was true of the entire country. People were just losing their homes right and left. As I say you could buy these lovely homes for $500. But nobody had $100, let alone $500. I remember all that generally.

Kendall How did your family feel about it? This period?

Powell Well. They were hard times. But again, they coped.

Kendall Was there any discussion about it in the family at all?

Powell There was on a local level. One of our next door neighbors lived in a flat where the landlords lived upstairs. It was one of these big old homes. The landlords were an elderly couple, and they had had the first floor made into two flats. And a used car salesman and his wife and daughter, who was my age, moved in their. And of course nobody had any money to buy his cars. So he never had a dime. And ~~and~~ the landlords, husband and wife, were the nicest kindliest couple you would ever meet. And they had been there when we moved there, so I knew them my whole life there. And they just let these people live there rent free for many years. They came home one night and everything was gone, including every globe. These people had gone off. So my mother and father were upset about that. They thought that even if they felt they had to go someplace that they should have at least been honest about it and say that, and tell them why they were going, and where they were going, maybe they had an opportunity somewhere and they would keep in touch and try through the years to pay them back, to thank them. So that was one expression. Then

Powell the landlords also had relatives. I forget in what state, but some farming communities in a different state than California, where they just sent for all the children and just took them in for years in that depression. They sent them to school so that they would not be deprived. These were the kinds of discussions we would have in our house on that level, no grandiose level at all. A newspaper level discussion, and a personal discussion.

Kendall Well, this was about the time Hitler was coming into power too. Was there any discussion about that?

Powell Not too much. I sort of backtracked into that myself accidentally, which has been interesting for me. What happened was I really didn't know too much, although I always loved to read, I really didn't know too much about books. And on a high school level I had finally gotten involved in good literature in the library, the public library, but frequently I didn't know all the great writers. Sometimes I would just go through the stacks and see what was available, and accidently I got a book out by Feuchtwanger called Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow. And it was fictional but it was presupposing a Hitler and a German-Jewish family and what happened. And it really told me about Germany and its prospects at a very early time in the United States before most Americans were realizing what was going on in Germany. But it was totally accidental. I had never heard of Feuchtwanger before that time.

Kendall What were your basic interests in school?

Powell Primarily it would be history, english, chemistry. I had two years of Latin, two years of French. I loved that. I had always been interested in languages indirectly. My aunt had subscribed for me as a youngster to this magazine called Childlife. And there was a tremendous discussion in that magazine

Powell on the world. And then I was a stamp collector anc collecting stamps from around the world got me very interested in countries, geography, this kind of thing. It was incidental, but became an important part of my life too as I developed.

Kendall Well, you know we have used up a whole hour. It's amazing. We'll just let the tape run because it's only a few minutes. Next time we'll go on into your schooling a little bit more. Has it been relatively painless?

Powell Oh, yes. Recall of specifics is difficult. Like some of these table talks I do remember was light stuff, and the grand stuff, the great stuff, were these big gatherings where I would be sitting in a corner when they had finished eating, and now they were into it.

Kendall Helene, we started into your school life and then, but we ended up last time with your telling about your family gatherings. Let's continue from there. I really don't get a feeling of what the conversations were about, what they talked about specifically.

Powell They talked about everything, really, politica quite a bit - the whole national scene, the international scene, and what in those days was called the Negro Question was always a very important part of the discussion. It was on that level. I wouldn't call it politics solely, but it was a fairly high level discussion. Certainly not intellectural. But they were read on a newspaper and magazine level. They were informed and knowledgeable about what they were talking about. And that was it really, mainly. Those kinds of things.

Kendall You know I just read a speech that Haley gave before a Historical Society and he said the whole basis of his writing Roots was on the basis of back porch conversations of his family, and they were talking about their ancestors. Did your family ever think about their ancestry?

Powell Indirectly. In those days - I certainly never got what Haley got, unfortunately, never. So many of the family had just died off, at early ages, so that I never even met many of my ancestors that normally people would have met, grandparents and even great grandparents.

( My playmate whom I mentioned had a great-great-grandmother when I was a child and played with her.) So we never had these kind of family relatives who lived long enough. At the same time,however,it was interesting that in those days these subjects were more or less verboten, forbidden, that you weren't

Powell supposed to know about the days of slavery, etc. However this could come out a good deal in these family discussions after dinner. For instance my great uncle was a babe in arms at emancipation time, and so his parents would have been slaves. And these are the kinds of things I would pick up. And both my great aunt and her sister, my father's mother, were born in Canada, and that always led us to presume that their parents had gotten there through the underground railroad, and that there was no other reason for them to be born in Canada. And this kind of thing, really, but never to the depth of Haley's family.

Kendall Well, actually his family discussions weren't much depth. They just were repeating stories and a few words --

Powell In depth, I mean in the time that the stories were related - that kind of oral history.

Kendall Did they ever talk about Mary Ellen Pleasant?

Powell Yes. They were terribly familiar with the whole San Francisso scene. And she was sort of a folk hero in a way.

Kendall You said your father read a lot of papers. There were a couple of papers around that time, I believe, The San Jose Forum and the Oakland Sunshine, They were the only black papers in the community that I could find during that period - did he read any of them?

Powell No. The newspapers were the commercial press. In San Jose it was the San Jose News, and the Berkeley Herald. And he also subscribed to the San Francisco Call Bulletin.

Kendall You were about 10 or 11 when the Scottsboro Case came on the national scene. Was there much discussion on this?

Powell All these things, they would be discussed by the adults after dinner. So I heard about the Scottsboro

Powell Boys almost from the time that things began, and the thinking was that they were framed and this was part of so-called injustice (so called justice but really injustice) in the United States.

Kendall Well -

Powell Of course, I wasn't able to make any judgments. I just heard this. Of course I was impressed, but it just stayed dormant.

Kendall What did they do about any of this injustice?

Powell Nothing. Absolutely nothing. They just tried to earn a living.

Kendall Can you explain this sort of isolation, I mean this sense of injustice and yet this isolation from doing anything about it?

Powell Well. I think it's the opposite endof the pole. I think it is rare that people get involved in those days. Very rare. Later on, in the late 3o's, in the Bay Area there was a certain amount of involvement by people in the Scottsboro case,but then even there this was a minority. I would say it was rare for people to get involved to fight social injustices in those days, and that most pepple did just what my parents did, They talked about it in the privacy of the home.

Kendall Was there equal participation between men and women in the conversations?

Powell It must have been more participation by the men, with the women participating, but not on a totally equal basis, and I think that would be that that's how they saw their role. Men did more of the talking.

Kendall I was wondering because your mother was obviously more knowledgeableabout what was going on, read more.

Powell Yes, but she had this very quiet personality so that she never overtook any conversation by anybody on anything.

Kendall Did they ever disagree?

Powell On these kinds of questions, no.

Kendall On any questions?

Powell Well, they would disagree about certain things about raising children. For instance, I always wanted to drive. In those days California had a law that if both parents would sign a form that it was necessary that a 14 year old drive a car, that the Department of Motor Vehicles would grant a license,after the test had been taken, to a 14 year old. Although other than that the child could not get a driver's license until he was 16. And again both parents had to sign, but they did not have to say any special reason. And my father was willing to sign. But my mother refused to sign. She said there was no reason, and she wasn't going to lie. And so I didn't get my drivers license until I was 16.

Kendall I remember her having that accident when she first started - probably that was a contributing --- (laughter)

Powell So, little things of that nature there was disagreement.

Kendall This was a question that, when I was reading through the transcript sort of worried me. You seemed to have had an almost ideal childhood for a young black girl in a small town. Can you explain this?

Powell Part of it was that it was a very small town in those days. The population was 50,000. It is a huge city now, almost ready to overtake San Francisco in population. As I mentioned before, there were blacks in San Francisco*spreadout. There would be one black family on our whole block. There were very few blacks there to start out with. The ghetto was so tiny, it might have been one or two blacks, possibly three was the ghetto.

- - - - -

*probably meant San Jose instead of S.F.

Powell So that was the explanation. In those days people really didn't think about it so much - that is white people. I mean where my great aunt lived. As a matter of fact with my great aunt (to give you an idea of what I am talking about), she died a few years ago at 85 in a rest home in San Jose - a convalescent home. She had a series of strokes. And after many strokes she had so much brain damage that she was unaware of where she was or anything else. In the meantime, on her street there had been a neighbor, and they had their little quarrels, etc. as neighbors will from time to time. This neighbor died. My great aunt was one of her heirs. I forget how much it was, but it was over $1,000. This was the kind of thing that went on there. Before my great aunt went to the convelescent home many of the neighbors were stopping by bringing her little things, looking in on her. There wasn't this big hang up there. This probably was because there were so few blacks in San Jose. People seemed to get fearful when the number increases.

Kendall There was a feeling that economics is the only cause of discrimination. Do you feel that is true, that the economic situation causes discrimination of any minority?

Powell Economics is behind it, yes. But I don't think it comes out on that level. Because I think the people who have such deep prejudices, that they have been taught by their parents when they had been youngsters - that none of these deeply prejudiced people actually realize that it is economics. Although personally I believe that economics is the root of it. And then the prejudices become so inlaid. Theoretically, even given excellent economic conditions where there would be full employment I personally think it takes generations to truly wipe out prejudice.

Kendall Let's see now, we were going to go a little bit into what the community was like as a whole, you had some memories of that.

Powell Well, that it was a politically tight community. As I recall the popular feeling was the Catholics ran City Hall and the Masons ran the post office. Whether that's true or not, I don't know. And there was an attorney by the name of Lewis O'Neil who people said (whether that's true or not, I don't know) ran the town. He was the one to see if anything had to be done. . So it was a rather conservative community.

There was deep prejudice there against Mexicans and Filipinos. I do remember that. That was a time when Filipino women were not permitted in this country. And the Filipinos lived and worked in a little town outside of San Jose called Alviso. They were looked down upon. But mainly because there were no women in their lives, and they were trying to have normal lives and make acquaintances with women.

Kendall There were agricultural strikes during this period. These Filipinos were probably agricultural workers.

Powell Yes. they were.

Kendall Well, can you -

Powell On the strikes -

Kendall Yes.

Powell No,I don't remember about the strikes. What years were the strikes in?

Kendall 19 33 - 34 - that whole period.

Powell Because in San Jose I really don't recall any strikes. In fact on an agricultural basis in that time, in the early 30's. In 34,35 and 36 there were no unions whatsoever in the canneries or the dried fruit plants. They worked strictly on a almost patronage basis. The canneries would have fore-ladies, and the cannery workers would bring gifts

Powell to the foreladies, and this was part of the process. I recall that as just a child that i heard that all the time. There were absolutely no unions in the canneries and the dried fruit plants which were huge industries in those days. That was long before the tracts came and all the orchards were, you know, bulldozed to make room for the tract homes. So, no I don't recall any strikes in San Jose. Maybe in other areas surrounding San Jose.

Kendall They didn't affect you then?

Powell No, I don't even recall any.

Kendall Did any of your family work, or your friends work in the industry?

Powell My great aunt always was there working in the canneries every summer. There again, no racial prejudice on that job. Of course it was a lousy job.Itwas all paid by piece work. The faster you worked and the more you did the more money you hade. Also xxxxxxx the longer hours you worked. You could work from sun up to sundown.

Kendall Did she every speak of any objection to thattype of activity?

Powell Oh no. She was glad to have an opportunity to get the money.

Kendall During the period when you were youhg they had that lynching in San Jose, the Hart case. *

Powell Yes. I forget what year that was. I was in high school. I would have been about fifteen, I think.

Kendall I didn't look the year up. I'm sorry. It was around the period of the agricultural strikes, 1933 or 1934 I think, or before then even.

Powell No. It wouldnt have been before.

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

*Department store owner's son kidnapped and held for ransome. His body was found mutilated. Two men involved. One admitted guilt.

Powell It would have geen 1933 or 1934, I think.

Kendall You remember anything about it?

Powell Oh, I remember that because - of course the Hart case had been in the newspaper for days on end. Everybody was talking about it in San Jose. It was the only topic of conversation, even among youngsters. And I went to school that day and heard from other students that there was going to be a lynching that night. So I went home and told my mother that there was going to be a lynching and that everybody was going and that I wanted to go. And she said "absolutely not. Nobody is leaving this house." So we didn't go out. And of course when I look back I just see the righteousness of my mother trying to cope with a teen ager. But it was interesting how high school students, some high school students, or even one (whoever spread the wordI don't know) had that information the morning of the night there was going to be a lynching. Evidently it was a set up job that no policemen would be in the jail, that the doors would be unlocked; that a mob could enter safely and get their prey. That's what they did. They went right in and they took these two men out. One had confessed his guilt. The other said that he was totally innocent. They took them to St. James Park, hung themup to trees, put fire under their feet and lynched them. And there was a huge crowd there. So that apparently everybody in town knew that this was going to take place. Sunny Jim Rolph was Governor then, and I don't recall his exact quote, but he made some remark that this was a good thing - something to that effect. He condoned this kind of mob taking the law into its own hands when the lunch victims were obviously so guilty.

Kendall — Did your family at the next gathering discuss this?

Powell — I don't recall. I do recall subsequent discussions that they thought this was just terrible that the public would take justice into its own hands. Even if both had been guilty they should have had a trial and the law of the land should make decisions of this kind and not the people. Yes there were many discussions on that.

Kendall — You mentioned something about people popping in on Sundays to see you from San Francisco. Tell me a litle bit about that.

Powell — These were family friends of my parents. They had grown up of course in a (again I don't think there were ghettos in San Francisco) in the early part of the twentieth century, but the black community was a social community. So they had grown up in that community and most of these people were friends whom they had known as at least young teenagers and they subsequently married and had families - this kind of thing. So they would be coming down to San Jose either just to spend the day and go backto San Francisco or they would be enroute somewhere else like Los Angeles, and they would break their stay that way. And in those days there was prejudice against blacks in all hotels, (there weren't any motels in those days) so this was commonly done by blacks. You always had someplace where you could eat and lie down. They were personal friends, and nothing heavy in the light of discussions. Catching up on what was going on, the children's lives and this kind of thing.

Kendall — Were you always prepared for people coming in?

Powell — Never because we just never counted on these visits. But what my parents would do - there was a great

Powell Italian hotel in San Jose then, amd they had a policy of letting people come in with stockpots and buy food there to take out. And that's how we always solved that problem. It was great Italian food, spaghetti, raviolis and meat. And my sister and I and my father we would get the stock pots and we would go down there and you always had to wait in line - other people doing the same thing. And we would go back and frequently, if we were going to eat right then, it was hot enough to serve right from the stock pots. If we were going to eat later we would just warm it over. And it was very reasonable in price - extremely reasonable.

Kendall Did you have a telephone?

Powell Oh, yes.

Kendall But people didn't call you?

Powell Oh, no. Never a long distance call. Everyone was very conscious about spending money.

Kendall Another thing I missed in the first tape was whether you and your sister had any chores in the home.

Powell Oh yes.

Kendall What were they.

Powell I had to feed the chickens. Then I watered the garden which was considerable, the flower garden and the vegetable garden. And usually I would mow the lawn, and usually for mowigg the lawn I would get a quarter. There were two huge front lawns though. And washing the automobile, keeping the bedroom tidy - a little housework - doing the dishes. Housework and dishes - my sister and I were both involved in that. That sort of thing. Then at certain seasons when the chickens would lay a lot of eggs, we were given the eggs. We could go around and sell them to the neighbors. We sold them at a price which would be less than that which you could buy them for in a grocery store. The neighbors just gobbled them up because they knew they were so much fresher. That sort of thing.

Kendall Was your payment in eggs and quarters a substitute for

Kendall an allowance.

Powell I never had an allowance. Never heard of the word until many years later. We had little ways of earning money. My playmate and I (her father was the one who was a laundry truck driver)and part of his route took him to Almadan which is ten miles out of San Jose, and he would buy a sack of corn. We would take the sack of corn in her wagon house to house and sell it. Then we would make enough money where we would pay him back for the sack of corn and have our profit and buy more corn so that we always woundup having, making money. These kinds of things.

Kendall= You mentioned your mother wanting you to go to college and your accepting this, and you wanted to go too, but did you have any specific ideas of what you wanted to be, dreams -

Powell Absolutely none. I knew nothing about anything. The only thing that interested me as a youngster was becoming a lawyer. I really wanted to become a lawyer. But I wasn't necessarily thinking in terms of college. I didn't know whether this was realistic or not.There was this Lamson case. I don't know whether you remember you remember that or not, David Lamson.* And his case was very controversial, whether he had murdered his wife or not. Also at that time Bert and Marge was a radio program and Jack Armstrong was the defense attorney (probably the original Perry Mason) so I was very interested in becoming adefense attorney because I thought that many innocent people were going to prison who shouldn't be going, but this was all idealistic. I had absolutely no proof. This was just all in my mind. I did clip out a coupon from the Call Bulletin when I was fourteen that advertised a course in law at the La Salle University, and they had no idea that this was a fourteen year old girl. They sent a salesman from San Francisco

---

* Ed. Note: Called the "Bathtub Murder". He was accused of murdering his wife. Said she had fallen in. Was found guilty.

Powell to San Jose. My father answered the door and they said is there a Helene Powell there; and they got me, and they were just shocked when they saw this child, and they said, well when you are older come see us again, and I said, "what about all the free literature?" And they said, we'll be sending it to you. So I did - so that was the only thing that I had a desire to be. I didn't even know about anything else until I got to college. Other fields I never even heard about, socialogist, psychologist, I didn't even know the words.

Kendall Did you have any dreams or fantasies about your future - marriage, children?

Powell Well, in a way. No really. I just thought that it evolved. Not fantasies, I would say.

Kendall Did your mother ever specifically say what she wanted you to be outside of wanting you to go to college?

Powell No. My aunt was a civil service worker, and since I was familiar with that I thought that might be something. And my aunt said, "you don't want to be a civil service worker. There are many better things than that you can do. But again, nothing specifically. Other than that one thought about being a lawyer I never had career goals as such.

Kendall OK. We can go to high school now. We sort of briefly went through your grammar school and there wasn't anything particularly. Do you remember any key, any high points in your grammar school experiences?

Powell No, it was very pleasant. High school the same.

Kendall Well, at Notre Dame who were your friends?

Powell Well, Notre Dame at that time was the only Catholic High School in San Jose. In fact there was only one public high school in San Jose, San Jose High, so students at both schools came from the entire community. And my playmate decided to go to San Jose High School so that since I went to Notre Dame High School I was the only one on my block who went there, and the youngsters there came from other sections of the community. Some of my friends were

Powell the youngsters I had gone to elementary school with, and then I made new friends there also, so I had many, many friends there, some from the elementary school, and then many new friends. In those days, as I mentioned before, it wasn't this thing you have now where children would stay overnight at other children's homes. That never happened to anyone in those days. We always went home at night.

Kendall How did you participate in school life?

Powell On the high school level there I was on all the teams that they had, and that would be basketball and volleyball, and we would frequently come to San Francisco for inter school sports. There was a (it wasn't really a newspaper - maybe something like a newsletter) that I was involved with. They had many (not many, but several) field trips during the year where students who wanted to hear an opera in San Francisco would go. I always went to the field trips. Santa Clara University provided certain opportunities for field trips, sometimes on the religious side like the pageant production of the King of Kings, things of that nature.I was always interested in anything that was available. There was a tennis court there and we played tennis every day, but that was about the level. There was a Latin Club. I was a member of that. My life there was extremely sheltered in San Jose. But most of my peer group also led very sheltered lives. Parents had tremendous control, and we might rebel against it but ultimately we accepted it.

Kendall I asked you who your friends were at school. What was the relationship? Was it different between boys and girls?

Powell Oh, Notre Dame was all girls.

Kendall When did you start becoming interested in boys, then?

Powell These girls, including myself, we were interested in boys all the time. Even in elementary school there was an interest in boys. In elementary school it

Powell it was co-ed until the third grade, and then the boys went to school around the corner, and the girls were just girls. But there was always interest there. But we certainly always knew the boys. And there would be these little parties, never unchaperoned as it is today. And that was really the extent of it. And then on the block we had these huge baseball games in the street, and that was boys and girls and neighbor involvement. You know, very normal and naturally really.

Kendall How did your mother approach your sex education?

Powell Poorly. (laughter) She didn't.

Kendall Oh, go on. Answer more fully than that.

Powell She really didn't. We knew all about sex and everything you know when we were really youngsters, but never from my mother.

Kendall Who from then?

Powell From the other kids.

Kendall Was it correct?

Powell Oh, yes, basically. Usually it would be someone who would be older. And then, of course, in certain high school courses. But by that time, we were fifteen or so where you were in biology where everything was very graphic and you got a very good understanding. We certainly never got any of that from the home. That was perhaps a weakness there.

Kendall How did she tell you about your menstrual periods?

Powell She didn't.

Kendall What happened then, at first ?

Powell Well, it just started and I wanted to know what was going on. Then I got told. (laughter).

Kendall Oh, I see. Were you frightened, or did you sort of know?

Powell Well, I might have sort of known. But I really was angry that I hadn't been told, prepared for this by my mother. I really was angry about that, indeed.

Kendall Well, I can understand -- well how did she (I'm getting incoherent) What did she tell you about it then?

Powell Oh she gave me a very good explanation then the whole story. I had always been extremely tiny physically for my age, and she might have thought that this wasn't

Powell going to happen, and that there was still time for her to discuss it with me. I don't know. And this didn't happen to my sister. She did explain it to my sister. That might have been involved - my size.

Kendall Did you tell her you were angry?

Powell Oh yes.

Kendall What was your relationship with your teachers there?

Powell Excellent. I was an excellent student and teachers liked excellent students. And I had this hang upon (I won't call it a hang up, I think it's admirable). I was very honest. I wouldn't cheat in an exam or anything of that nature. This was appreciated by teachers. I didn't tell a lie. This was appreciated by teachers. So that I had a very good relationship with the teachers.

Kendall Did any of them try to guide you in any direction for your future life?

Powell Well, not directly. I was taking the college preparatory program. It was just taken for granted that I would be going to college, but no discussions on that - no system such as a counseling set up that they have in schools now. However, when I left San Jose at the end of my junior year, I had planned to go to a polytechnic high school in the neighborhood where I would be living, and this one teacher did tell me not to go there - to go to Girls' High. At that time San Francisco had a public high school for girls only. And I said I would never go to a girls high school, and she said well,"if you are absolutely determined not to go to a girls high school, I recommend that you go to Lowell High School." This was strictly college preparatory and you couldn't get a getter education there than at Poly. And I took her advice and went to Lowell, and I was very glad that I did.

Kendall Well, we moved to San Francisco rather abruptly. Let's find out why. You finished your junior year -

Powell Yes. I was seventeen when I went to San Francisco.

Kendall And your junior year meant what during that period, your ninth or tenth grade?

Powell Eleventh grade.

Kendall Which meant you had one year to go.

Powell Right.

Kendall Well, why did your family move to San Francisco?

Powell Well, they had always wanted to move to San Francisco. Their hearts were in San Francisco. They were thinking also of the social lives of their daughters. There was no black ommunity in San Jose to speak of, so we didn't have an opportunity to associate with young black teenagers. So that was part of it too. They had had many many ties here, and still did have. And an opportunity came whereby -- the only way my father ever would have been able to San Francisco ih those days would have been if he could have found a mail carrier in San Francisco who wanted to move to San Jose. Evidently there was some kind of house journal for mail carriers. I know that there was no union, but there was an association of mail carriers, and probably there was this kind of information, because that's what happened. The San Francisco mail carrier wanted to move to San Jose and my father, upon investigating, decided that this was the time to make a move, so he did.

Kendall Did your mother give up her job then, or was she working?

Powell She was working. She gave up her job in San Jose. I'm trying to think. In the meantime Hartsooks in San Francisco was long gone, and I think Bushnells was too. And I don't think she worked then for a few years. Many years later she did become a sales clerk for the Emproium. And then after some heart attacks that ended her working career.

Kendall What did you do about the house you had in San Jose?

Powell We rented that to the San Franisco mail carrier who transferred to San Jose. I don't remember how many years he stayed there, a few years. And then we rented

Powell it to an older woman who some years later asked my mother (my father had died in the meantime) if she could buy it, and my mother said, "certainly".

Kendall Did you buy a home in San Francisco?

Powell Yes.

Kendall Was that this house?

Powell Yes.

Kendall What was your reaction to the move?

Powell Great. I hated San Jose. I always wanted San Francisco, and that might have been because of everything I had heard about San Francisco. And of course I had come to San Franisco so frequently as a youngster. I knew San Francisco fairly well. I didn't like small towns. There really wasn't any cultural activity. At that time the civic auditorium had burned down in San Jose. I don't ever remember it. And they had never replaced it. They have a civic auditorium now. They have had it for some years, but all those years there was no civic auditorium. Our greatest cultural life was during the W.P.A. (Works Progress Administration) days. Every Saturday night we would go to a junior high school there (in San Jose) the whole neighborhood, everybody. You would just see the whole block coming out of their front doors, and we would all go to Woodrow Wilson Junior High School where there would always been some kind of entertainment. Sometimesyou might have to pay a dime to get in. Sometimes it would be free. There would be variety shows, or little plays, or mustic, and that was the extent of it. And then my mother and the mother of my playmate would come to San Francisco occasionally for plays. And I had never really seen a legitimate play and I knew that I would like to see one. So I just was delighted, delighted.

Kendall Tell me a little bit about Lowell.

Powell Well, I didn't get too involved in Lowell. It was an excellent school then, academic. It was a surprise to me originally because at Notre Dame students walked single file. At Lowell, changing between classes, those corridors to me seemed mobbed with students. But

Powell I loked Lowell and was able to enjoy my last year there. That was the first time I ever went to a foreign film in my life. The French teacher, Miss Smith -- oh, there was only one foreign theatre in San Francisco then, the Clay Theatre. And we all went on a street car to the Clay Theatre and saw a French movie and a French cartoon, and I just got hooked. I have enjoyed certain foreign films ever since.

Kendall Was there any difficulty in adjusting ffom a small Catholic high school to a large public school?

Powell Very little. Negligible.

Kendall Did your interests change? I mean how did they change?

Powell Well, only to the degree that I was still growing, that college, the advent of college was almost upon me. I was shocked that we had to go to the store and buy apricots and buy peaches. I just hadn't thought much about it. We would go pick them off the trees or go down to the basement and get a jar of canned peaches or what have you. But it was just an easy transition.

Kendall Well, who were your new friends?

Powell Well, my new friends -- I had certain friends that I that I made at school. Then I got very involved with the Bay Area group of black teenagers, and that became a large part of my social life then.

Kendall Which was what?

Powell Oh, parties, dances, very very bourgeouis. Frequently live orchestras, long formals, the works.

Kendall Do you still have the friends you made in high school?

Powell From high school, no. The San Jose scene was behind me. My playmate died a few years ago. I always had remained in touch with her mother. No, the friends who became my adult friends were mainly from college and afterwards. I had many friends, you know, in this young black group, who were friends throughout the years. But they weren't in my school. In fact many of them lived in the East Bay, Berkeley. It was a Bay Area social life. There weren's many San Francisco

Powell blacks then either. That didn't happen until World War II. I think there were only about three thousand blacks in San Francisco in 1936.

Kendall During this period in Notre Dame and in Lowell a couple of things were happening. One was the war in Spain. Were you interested in politica then? Did you --

Powell Yes. I was aware of the civil war in Spain when I was in San Jose, and was pro Loyalist, anti-Franco, and have been ever since. Went to Spain this summer for the first time in my life, because I was never going to go until Franco died.

Kendall How did you become pro-Loyalist and anti=Franco?

Powell I don't know. Probably just through the newspapers. I remember when I was at Lowell, in my history class, the history teacher told us that the Loyalists were all communists. And I raised my hand and told her that I disagreed. She said, "what is your source?" I told her the Scholastic magazine. And the Scholastic magazine was a magazine we had to subscribe to in that course. She said, "well, you bring it." And I brought it. She read it to the class and apologized to the class, for the Scholastic magazine said the Loyalists were not all communists. And I have always admired that woman and have tried to base myself like her as a teacher - to be willing to admit mistakes and to apologize if a mistake has been made. But where my original inkling came from about the Spanish Loyalists I don't know, because I was really very young. when it started.

Kendall What about the San Francisco General Strike?

Powell The San Francisco General Strike? I was in San Jose then and I remember all the neighbors hoarding; that they really thought this was going to be a long one and that there wasn't going to be any food in the stores. Most of the people, most of my neighbors were pro the general strike. They just thought that working people didn't have a fair shake. They didn't know any of the details at all. But they were all working people

Powell themselves. Everybody was having such a hard time then, in those days. But that was the extent of my knowledge of the 1934 general strike.

Kendall What about the End Poverty in California movement?

Powell Yes. I remember that very well and I guess my whole family was in favor of that EPIC, E-P-I-C. I wasn't involved, but certainly hearing all the discussions that were pro I did accept it that way and thought that it might help people.

Kendall What I am trying to get at is when you first became interested in politics and started reading and thinking politically, because you are a political person.

Powell I would say originally it was these large discussions which weren't necessarily oriented that way. However my Uncle, Matt Crawford*, influenced me also.

Kendall (surprised) Oh, he's your uncle?

Powell Yes. My uncle by marriage. He married my sister's mother, my aunt. But he never really, you know, forced me into anything whatsoever. Or never pushed me. Absolutely never. But I always knew his views and appreciated his views, but to read this or read that, never a word. One of my favorite gifts that I received as a child. I was probably about nine or ten years old, and he wasn't my uncle then, was a little tiny globe of the world which I just treasured. As I had mentioned before, I have always been interested in the world, through the magazine Child's Life which my aunt had subscribed to for me, and then through stamp collecting. Then to get this globe, it just put it all together. But specifically reading politically, I don't remember what started that. Actually my first real reading that I enjoyed the most was getting involved in the literature, which was very

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

* A well known leader in the Black Community in the Bay Area, as well as a leader in the Co-Operative movement.

Powell incidental because in high school, of course, you had good literature. But it wasn't literature that appealed to me, Sir Walter Scott's Ivanhoe, Lady of the Lake, good literature, but, and I enjoyed it but I didn't love it. But again one of the San Jose teachers recommended that I read Sigrid Undset who was a Norwegian writer. I got out Kristen Lavrensdatter, read that trilogy, and after that I became a lover of good literature. I was really reading good literature more than anything else. The political orientation I think would have evolved. These discussions-- partly from my personality-- I think I was always sensitive, and maybe even from the Bert and Marge days, I always seemed to have a place in my heart for a person who had been misjudged, or something on that level. But, like on Spain, God knows. I didn't do amything about it other than - Of course, I will say this, looking back, as I recall San Francisco was extremely pro-Loyalist, and that was part of it I remember too.

Kendall What started your interest in languages? - another thing that is basic to your nature.

Powell I don't know. I know with Child's Life I did become more interested in France. And then of course I took French both in San Jose and in San Francisco, and I had had three years of Latin at San Jose. When I went to Cal (University of California at Berkeley) I took Spanish my first semester and just fell in love with it, so that I wound up taking it every semester, every year I was there.. I also took French. But I guess it was just part of aopening of the world. Of course in those days it never sawned on my that I would ever get out of the United States. And I just had this interest. It came, I guess, from geography originally in the third grade.

Kendall Well, Let's see. Were' going to college very shortly. Let's finish this tape. In fact it's finished, so we'll just let it go on. Can you stand another half hour or soxxxxxxxx - - - -

Kendall You said you remembered something else anout Spain?

Powell Yes. There was a great influence, probably, in my thinking about Spain, that I had forgotten all about was a girlhood friend of my aunt's, Louise Thompson, now Louise Thompson Patterson, she was very much in my life at that time because she was such a very good friend of my aunt's. And my aunt had two friends which she had had from early days. The other was Dorothy Fischer who eventually became Dorothy Spenser. They would take trips together, this kind of thing. For their time they were considered daring young women because they would go to New York. They went to New York, I should say, and this was considered a big trip. Or they would go to Nevada. Louise was a - I still have books from her she gave me as a child, good children's books, so that I have very, very fond memories of Louise, and we are still in touch. And she went to Spain. I don't remember in what capacity, but she went to Spain during the civil war and I remember her telling us (not us) the adults about some of the atrocities that the Franco forces were commiting against the Loyalist groups. So that would have been a factor, because that would have stayed in my mind. I just happened to recall that.

Kendall Well, good.

Powell That triggered it.

Kendall There's just a nosy question I wanted to ask about your family. What did they think about prohibition?

Powell Well, about prohibition, I don't remember whether they liked it or disliked it. I would presume that they disliked it. I remember that we always had wine. My mother never drank. The way that wine worked in our house was again - wine was never served. They wouldn't drink wine except at one of these big gatherings that took place at my great aunt's house. The children, my sister and I, were permitted to have a teaspoon of wine in a glass of seltzer water. They had one of those bottles then that squirted. And I justthought

Powell that was the biggest treat in the world, a teaspoon of wine in this glass of seltzer water. It really made me feel grown up. My sister hated it, so that was that. My father always said when we got older, "If you girls are going to do any drinking I want you to learn how to drink in this house and noplace else." But it never came to be. Anyway, because of this little teaspoon of wine, it was an excellent education on how to drink - really. But I do remember going out with my father during prohibition days out again to Almadan ten miles out from San Jose to a ranch that was owned by an Italian American and he would get his bottle of wine. Also my next door neighbor, the man there made claret wine, so he always would give my father bottles of claret wine. Wine was certainly known in the house on these very rare occasions..

Kendall There's another thing I am confused on. You had a great aunt and an aunt. I don't dig this great aunt business.

Powell The great aunt was the sister of my father's mother. She is the one who died a few years ago.

Kendall She is the one who lived on the big street in San Jose?

Powell Right.

Kendall And your aunt is your mother's sister?

Powell Right. She just died a few years ago, but her home was in Berkeley

Kendall OK. Let's go to college. What determined your choice of college?

Powell Well, I think that (University of California at Berkeley) the fact that I was in San Francisco and that was the only four year university available in those days. San Francisco State College then was more of a normal school. I think only could become a teacher if one went to San Francisco State in those days. I think it was still a normal school. City College I wasn't particularly interested in, and U.C. was really in the back of my mind as far as a good university --

Kendall You said teacher. When did you decide to become a teacher?

Powell Not many years ago. I didn't really decide to become

Powell a teacher until late in life, although my program was set up that way it really wasn't my career goal at all.

Kendall What was your career goal?

Powell Well, I didn't have any when I entered college. I didn't have a career goal then. For me it was just a time of exploring. That's what it turned out to be. I knew nothing, literally. I knew nothing. And it just opened up doors for me. Some of the subjects that I had to take - psychology, geology, and economics. These things were brand new things for me. The only things I was familiar with would be French and English.

Kendall Was there something called a major then, and a minor?

Powell Yes. There was a mjaor and a minor, and I started out as an English major, and a French minor. I think we had to sign up stating our preference. But through the years I became so enamoured with Spanish that I switched my major from English to Spanish.

Kendall When you went to school did you continue to live at home?

Powell The first year I lived with my aunt and uncle in Berkeley. That was for a couple of reasons. One was it was really going to be a terrible financial strain on the family to have me go. Secondly my aunt was aware that this might be quite a difficult experience for me to come from a little town (even though I had been in San Francisco for a year)the San Jose background in this little town, then going to this huge campus. And then she thought it would take a financial load off my parents. She could be responsible for my meals and all that. plus There was no bridge then. She thought it would be easier for me and the family all the way around if I stayed there until I made the adjustment. So I did.

Kendall And then did you move back home?

Powell Yes, and stayed at home the whole time.

Kendall The bridge was built then? It was built in 1934 wasn't it? - or 35, I think.

Powell No. If it was it wasn't in use because my first year,

Powell which would have been my second year at Cal., when I went to school I went on the ferry boat. So if it were built it wasn't in use for trains, because I definitely went on the ferry boat for my entire second year, and the third year it was built. Oh, wait a minute -

Kendall It doesn't really matter.

Powell The bridge was built, and I did take the train..

Kendall Your aunt was concerned about your transition. I was concerned too. What was your reaction?

Powell Well, it was negligible really. I just got there and loved it. Ate the whole thing up - the greatest thing that ever happened. No, there was no difficulty whatsoever on that.It was a whole new world to me that I just loved.

Kendall Did you work at all during your college life?

Powell I did, probably starting my sophmore year. I forget whether it was my sophmore year or junior year. It was very difficult to get any kind of work then. I really wanted to work. I wanted extra money. However they had what was called the N.Y.A., the National Youth Administration, and I was able to get a job with the N.Y.A. as a Spanish translator, so I know it couldn't have been my first year. I didn't know Spanish. But I did take a crash course in Spanish in the sense that it was five days a week when in those days Spanish courses were three days a week, and you learned so much in a university compared to a high school. You do about three times as much work on a university level as you do in one year in high school.So that I was on N.Y.A., and I got $15. a month. But that helped. It helped to pay for my commute book, for my books. It paid for incidentals It didn't pay for clothing either.

Kendall Did it interfere with your studies?

Powell Oh, no.

Kendall Who were your friends in college?

Powell I had many friends in college. Many of them were just classmates in certain courses. There was a whole group (well not a whole group) there was a small group

Powell of blacks who were my friends. That would be about it - classmates and the black students.

Kendall What did you do together?

Powell No much, really. With the black friends - we were involved in this social pattern, and it was parties and dances, parties and dances.

Kendall Did you have any particular teacher who influenced you in college?

Powell Not that I recall. Most of these courses that were required for the general education were lecture courses. I would say no. It was the content that opened up fields for me rather than the teacher. I never became friendly with anyteachers.

Kendall What fields were opened to you?

Powell Well, for instance geology where I only took one course but I just knew nothing about that part of knowledge. Economics I knew nothing about, really. And psychology I knew nothing about. One thing I just fell in love with was philosophy. And I took many courses in philosophy because I enjoyed the subject. That probably was my favorite subject of all. I just ate that up.

Kendall How did you participate in school life?

Powell Well, rather fully at U.C. There was the Associated Student Government Committee called theCommittee for Peace. I was a member of that. The last two years at Cal. I was president of the Negro students club. I was involved indirectly and not too long with the Student Workers Federation. The California Youth Legislature was active and I was involved in that. I was sent by them as a delegate in 1940 to a conference on Democracy in Education at Harvard University.

Kendall Let's go back now. What did the California Youth Legislature stand for?

Powell I don't remember its origin. It was a mock Legislature. It was comprised of young people, many of whom were university students throughout California, and

Powell it was set up on a basis to resemble a legislature, so that I guess one could call it representative democracy. And it was interested in many of the social questions. Specifically I don't recall them. But I do remember this was the conference I attended. It was a concern that there was not democracy in education.

Kendall How did you happen to join this?

Powell Probably friends, interests, this kind of thing.

Kendall Do you remember anything about the meeting you went to?

Powell Well. I remember that I met many, many interesting young people from around the country. I remember attending the lectures. I did come back and speak at a Sather Gate meeting about what had occured at the conference.

Kendall I want to work backwards here. Tell me what the Student Workers Federation was.

Powell It was an organization. I don't have too much specific recall on this, but it was a students organization that was interested in improving the conditions and wages of those students who were working. Usually these would be places like creameries or drug stores, different small businesses.

Kendall Why did you join this?

Powell As I say, this would probably be a concern - that students should be paid a decent wage. This kind of thing. And I don't remember being too active. I was just interested in its goals, really.

Kendall Were you an officer of the Negro StudentsClub?

Powell I was the president for the last two years.

Kendall What did they do?

Powell At that time we were rather politically involved. But the details again - they are gone.

Kendall This peace group - what was it?

Powell It was a group that was interested in having peace in the world. And of course my graduating class, the class of '41, was the last peacetime class to graduate

Powell for some years. And there method of work was predominantely (primarily that is) to get speakers. Everything had to be approved by the administration. Many of the suggestions would be turned down because this was an official committee of the Associated Student Bodies. At that time everything had to be approved by the administration, so speakers like Paul Robeson, we were denied permission to request their appearance. But it was just an organized student committee that was interested in having peace in the world. And they did this primarily through having speakers, usually nationally known people who had a position on peace in the world.

Kendall Can you explain your involvement in these four very active groups, from not being interested in politics at all and suddenly blossoming out into this major activity on campus?

Powell Well I think primarily there were many, many, many activities on campus. All kinds of committees. Students were welcomed to participate, and these happened to be the ones that interested me. I think that they were there, they were available, and they coincided with my interests. They by becoming part of them, of course I would become more involved.

Kendall The House UnAmerican Activities Committee was formed about then, Was there any discussion about that?

Powell There was, but I don't remember it in too much detail. I remember the Martin Dies committee and Shirley Temple being named as a communist. This kind of thing. The students mostly pooh poohed the Committee and had no respect for Martin Dies and this particular committee. At least the students with whom I associated,

Kendall This peace group - what was your reaction and the groups' reaction to the Nazi-Soviet non aggression pact?

Powell I don't remember if there were a reaction at all, people just discussing it loosely - not part of the committee work or not part of the committee discussion. They were surprised and shocked. It came out like a bolt

Powell out of the blue.

Kendall The Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union took place just before you graduated too, didn't it?

Powell Yes.

Kendall That was sort of a shock too, I guess. Was there discussion about Hitlerism?

Powell Well, this peace committee was rather progressive in its outlook. There were discussions, but the nature of them I don't recall. This comittee was very anti-Hitler, extremely anti-Hitler. And there was really a large peace movement on campus. These were people who were not involved in anything who wanted peace. There would be a peace rally at the University. There would be thousands there at Sather Gate who just wanted to hear about this -tremendous concern about the possiblity of war. -- a Life magazine picture of students at Sather gate.

Kendall= Oh, you kept it. Good. I don't know how to word this. Maube you can help me. Did you drift away from your Negro friends, into a larger group, in the course of your school activities?

Powell It wasnt a drift at all. I maintained the two at the same time. And part of it was that some of my involvement in a committee like the Peace Committee was not looked upon with favor by my black friends, but it was accepted. And I was elected president of the Negro Students Club so that you could see that it was accepted.

Kendall What were the main activities of the Negro Students Club?

Powell It had a long history on campus, and the activities varied from year to year and from the type of leadership that was involved. When I was involved it was rather politically oriented. We were interested in justice in certain areas. I know we were concerned about lynchings that were taking place in the deep South even at that time in history. We were interested in questions that there was discrimination against Negroes - these kinds of things.

Kendall What did they do about it?

Powell No too much at all in an organizdd manner. There would be meetings, very small meetings out on the lawn, or something of that nature, press releases, and certain things would be taken up at the Executive Student Committee of the Associated Student Body. This is where most action would take place, at the Executive Student meetings where a point of view would be given, and then the Daily Californian would print this./ That was the extent of it basically. the next day.

Kendall Did other groups ever contact the Club and offer to cooperate with them in doing anything?

Powell No. It would be just, "why don't you join" such and such a committee. But never the other way around.

Kendall Was just wondering because there must have been some more left groups who might have contacted them during that time.

Powell Well, there was involvement actually with other groups on certain issues, but I would have to refresh my memory on the details. I know it was an active group and it was very politically involved. That was the road it chose to take at that time. But many of them were student oriented issues and not these local things, so that I don't really have much recall on that.

Kendall Do you think the trend it took was because you were President? Did you direct the trends in any way?

Powell At that time I think that was partially true, because I think it changed after I graduated. And for some people the change was probably welcome.

Kendall How was your family life affected by your continual activities in school. Were you able to maintain a family life too?

Powell Oh yes. I was home every night, and the same family life was maintained.

Kendall Did your mother and father ever discuss your education with you?

Powell My father not too much. My mother actually would help me. I would have a paper to type and was running out

of time. I would have it all written. And every now and then my mother would type a paper for me. She was very interested in my academic progress.

Kendall While you were in college did she ever discuss yo r future with you?

Powell Yes, and of course she was very aware of the job situation. And if I were going to be a teacher, which was one possibilith with my major and minor, I would have had to go back for one year after graduation to get my teacher's credential. There really wasn't that much money around. And it was something I always thought - well I can always do it another time. I can always go back. There were no jobs anywhere for anybody. I did not want to be supported financially. I wanted to make my own way. Looking toward the future in those days also - if a teaching job had been available, assuming that I went back for a year, and got the teacher's certificate, no job would be available in the Bay Area. The only job I might have gotten in those days would have been in the sticks someplace. And I mean sticks. And I just really wasn't interested in it at that time. All I wanted immediately was a job.

Kendall We could go back into this. Let's just graduate you. Tell me about your graduation.

Powell My graduation. Let's backtrack a little bit.

Kendall Good.

Powell Because, through the Student Workers Federation, Local 6 of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union had given the Student Workers Federation, or had said that they would have available two or three warehouse jobs. So I went to Local 6 and was sent out to Alexander Belart Coffee Company. I finished school in May '41. Graduation ceremony wasn't going to be held until June '41. So when it came time to graduate I had to take the day off. And I graduated - a big family celebration, and this kind of thing.

Kendall Let's get back to the Student Workers Federation. I think I am more interested in this than anything because

Kendall it got you the job. How did it function as to getting people jobs?

Powell I think it was a personal thing. I think somebody in the Student Workers Federation knew somebody in Local 6 and said, "look, we have this group of students who are tuned in to the labor movement. They have been helping on projects with students who are working around the campus to improve conditions and wages. You should do something as a thank you." I would guess it had to be done on a personal basis; that it came from someone in the Student Workers Federation, and not Local 6.

Kendall Well, were you selected from the Student Workers Federation, or did you go by yourself? That is, of the two or three jobs that they had, were you selected to go over and get one of those jobs?

Powell I don't think so. I think we were just toldabout them and I was one who was interested and went.

Kendall What other things did the Student Workers Federation do for students?

Powell Their primary concern was for students who worked off campus.

Kendall I remember hearing about Aa Fair Bear group. Was this the same thing?

Powell No. The Fair Bear group was, as I recall, an official group of the Associated Student Body. And the Fair Bear group had a huge campaign for all these places again to pay fair wages of the student workers. I think the goals of the two organizations were primarily the same, but the Student Workers Federation chose different methods of achieving. What would happen with Fair Bear was there would be meetings with the employers, and if the employer agreed to pay fair wages the sticker would go up in that employer's window. I remember seeing some of these. And the Student Workers Federation, really it's goals were the same. Perhaps they saw them as a little larger - not only wages, but working conditions.

Kendall What did they do about it?

Powell Again, there would be these meetingswith the employers. As I said, I wasn't totally involved in that Student Workers Federation because of other interests. You could see that I had other interests. But I imagine that the pressure was a little greater.on the employers - that there would be pickets and this kind of thing. Butas to what they actually did, I really don't remember.

Kendall Well, I guess that will do. We have really gone over the time, over an hour and a half. We'll just go into your activities in the Warehouse Union and the beginning of the war on the next trip, OK.

Are you satisfied with the college years or not. Do you think we shou d go into it more fully?

Powell I don't know. I know that there were some specific things going on in campus those days that did affect that Negro Students Club, but I don't recall them. As to how important they were, I don't remember that. But I do know there was controversy on some of the positions taken. But how relevant I don't know.

Kendall I guess I should have gone over to Cal. yesterday instead of the ILWU.

Powell I remember the action and the activity, but I don't remember the specific events.

Kendall Well, they are on record anyway. The main thing is what you as a person did about things and how you evolved as a political and trade union person. So I think we've gottenthat anyway.. Jesus, I'm going to turn this off, or I'll be typing all this too.

Kendall Helene, when I did your tapes there were things that we missed. I want to go back and ask some questions. First, when you moved to 21st Avenue from San Jose were there any problems in your family obtaining the house?

Powell No.

Kendall How did they go about it?

Powell My mother had a friend with whom she had worked in the photographic studios. And this woman subsequently went into the real estate and insurance business. And she told my mother about this house, and we came up and saw it and concluded the deal.

Kendall: What was the neighborhood like then?

Powell: It was almost all Irish-Catholic, not just the neighborhood, but almost the entire Sunset was almost Irish-Catholic in those days - workingclass.

Kendall: Were there as many houses then as there are now?

Powell: Perhaps on this street, yes. But certainly not toward the ocean. There has been growth there since, with Doelger -

Kendall: Oh, I see. Well, how did you get along with your new neighbors?

Powell: Well, some of them of course we didn't associate with. There were some - well usually the color question. Some wouldn't speak with us. There was one woman who is still living - she particularly would not have anything to do with us. But through the years changed. But her children, we did have contact with her children. The neighbors on each side of us were always just fantastic neighbors. But there always was this situation where it wasn't like San Jose where neighbors were also personal friends because of the lifestyle in San Jose in those days. San Francisco was different. People did keep to themselves more. I wasn't home, but my mother when she was home would have her back yard conversations while the women on either side would be doing the

Powell: gardening. And she was doing the gardening. Very very friendly. There were two sisters on the far side, and they lived there for years, and years, and years. We never went into their home and they never came into this home. That wasn't the pattern at all in San Francisco. But when my mother had a heart attack (one of several heart attacks) my sister and I were both working. Oh, the two sisters next door, one worked and the other tended the house. The one that tended the house every day for months came over with a hott lunch for my mother. Refused to take one cent. She was just sort of looking in on her and also providing the lunch. That's the kind of a relationship it was.

Kendall: Your mother seemed to engender that kind of relationship, didn't she?

Powell: Yes. There was a special quality about her. She was very kind and very sweet and it must have come out in her relationships with people.

Kendall: What about church - all these Irish-Catholics, did you go to church with them?

Powell: Well, not with them. For a while I went to St. Anne's which was the Parish church and still is the Parish church. We would go there every Sunday. But that would just be my sister and I who would go.

Kendall: Your neighbors, did they go too?

Powell: Oh, I don't know. I would presume so. The two sisters next door were Catholics, Irish-Catholics, and let's see - the neighbors next door at that time, I don't think they were Irish-Catholics, but when they moved an Irish Catholic and her family moved in.

Kendall: I see. Then we'll jump to another question. When you were going to high school, your relations with these young black friends that you had, that social group, did you make any social engagements out of the school area with your new school friends?

Powell: Well, yes. To a limited degree. I really didn't have too much of a social life per se. I was involved

Powell: with them, you know - dinners, parties, this kind of thing. But small parties.

Kendall: Where were the parties?

Powell: In homes or apartments. There were a certain group of students whom I met who maintained their own apartments.

Kendall: In high school?

Powell: No, no, no, in college. Oh, you are talking about high school

Kendall: Yes.

Powell: No, in high school no, because I was only in San Francisco one year in high school.

Kendall: OK. We'll get to college later on then. When you went to stay with your aunt your first year in college, was she remarried then, or was she single?

Powell: She was married.

Kendall: What kind of a life did you live with them? Tell me about it.

Powell: A home life situation. I would go to the campus every day, which was about two or three miles away. I usually walked. And I would be there all day and come back for dinner. Had my own room. And it was just a family situation.

Kendall: Well, who sat down for dinner?

Powell: My uncle, aunt, and myself.

Kendall: What did you discuss?

Powell: Oh, anything that was appropriate at the time. My uncle always liked to have the news on on the radio, and that would be just about dinner time. We would have just heard the news and that usually would get us into a conversation. What was going on on the campus. This kind of thing.

Kendall: Did he discuss with you your work with the organizations you belonged to there?

Powell: Indirectly, perhaps if I raised something. He was very interestedin what I was doing. He was interested in the life on campus.

Kendall: Did you discuss the question of Hitler, the Japanese?

Powell: Oh, all of this would have been involved.

Powell: Yes. We just discussed the gamut of what was going on.

Kendall: Were your aunt and uncle interestedin your activities for peace?

Powell: Yes. They were interested, you know, in what I was doing, my developing as a person. It was a real family interest.

Kendall: Did you miss your mother and father?

Powell: Well, I would come home on week ends. And it was a change, so there wasn't any sense of missing.

Kendall: There is another question I wanted to ask you. You had these big family gatherings. Did those family gatherings continue after you moved to San Francisco?

Powell Yes. Particularly for holidays. Always Christmas. Always Christmas, and many times Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving would vary. Sometimes we would go to another family member for Thanksgiving.

Kendall: Do you remember at what time, if ever, you were accepted into the conversation as an adult?

Powell: Well, I don't remember specifically. But certainly when I was a teenager. When we used to not be accepted as adults we were small. I would say as a teenager.

Kendall: Did you enter into the conversations then?

Powell: To a degree. As many young people I always thought I knew more than anybody else; that I had the right opinion and that some of the adults were wrong. And many years later I realized that I had been wrong. But I think it was just a part of growing up.

Kendall: Do you remember any specific instances of the conversations or anything, or any parts of the basis for disagreement?

Powell: Well, nothing political. I don't recall anything on that. I do remember in San Francisco at that time those ( I forget what they call them, those roller skating races) -

Kendall: Roller derbies.

Powell: Roller derbies. They were very, very popular. And I

Powell: just really enjoyed going to them. And there were stars, this kind of thing. You had your pets. And there were always fights among the skaters. And I always thought that they were real fights. And the adults told me that was all a put on, and it was all done deliberately to get people like me to want to go back the next time and see their favorites win a fight. I just didn't believe it you know, and I kept on saying that, and they kept on telling me that. Of course it was years later that I realized that they were right and that I was wrong. That was an insignificant thing. There were probably many other insignificant things.

Kendall: Here is another thing that interests me. Your family discussed things. We discussed this about the Scottsboro Boys when I asked what they were doing, and you said a lot of people didn't do anything. But now this changed. You participated in the discussions, but you did something.

Powell: Well, with the Scottsboro case -

Kendall: I mean not with the Scottsboro. What I am trying to say is the family discssed things within the confines of the family and agreed on what was fair and just and what wasn't and objected to injustice. Now, you objected to injustice, but you moved out and joined an organization and did something. Can you tell me why?

Powell: Well, I think it was just a process of involvement. For instance, with the Scottsboro case I remember fund raising dinners. This would be in the East Bay in college. That sort of thing. All the students were interested in peace in those days. And I did find that magazine for you, Life magazine, And it was just through meeting this person or meeting that person. And then the official campus community had a peace committee. I just decided I should become involved in that. And it was that kind of a process really.

Kendall: Were you ever asked to join a sorority?

Powell: Well, I did join a sorority. There were two black sororities. One was Delta Sigma Theta, which I did join. And the other was Alpha Kappa Kappa. I forget the name of that one. I think it was Alpha Kappa Kappa. And someone asked me to pledge. And I was really against sororities, but I did feel that these were unique in the sense that they were black sororities, and no one was really let out. If you wanted to become a member of a sorority there were these two and if you didn't make one you would make the other, and usually that's the way it happened, two bids, and make up your own mind.

Kendall: Was there any such thing as sorority life?

Powell: No, no. There was no sorority life. Maybe a few socials. It was very social, but no house or anything like that.

Kendall: How was it social.

Powell: Dances. There might be a big dance once a year. Something on that order.

Kendall: Did you participate in the leadership of the sorority in any way?

Powell: No.

Kendall: Well, OK let's get back to this then. This is a question that you started to answer before. Did you have a social life with anyone outside of your Negro social group or your black friends in the community, and if so what was it?

Powell: Well, that's what I was saying before. It was on a small level. Some of the students maintained their own apartments on campus. A small party occasionally on a Friday or a Saturday night. Frequently I would be a dinner guest at some of these friends. In the warm weather on a Saturday or a Sunday some of us would go over to Stinson Beach to swim. This kind of thing. A picnic there. That kind of thing.

Kendall: Did you still go around with the group of young people that your mother and father moved you to San Francisco for?

Kendall: Were a lot of them in school with you?

Powell: Oh, there were some blacks there, somewhere, and they would be involved in this same social life situation also.

Kendall: Then, did you sort of drift away from any of these other parties outside of campus.

Powell: Oh, no. I never drifted away from that group until later life. I was very involved in all the social life in my college.

Kendall: Both in campus and off campus?

Powell: Right.

Kendall: Did you start dating seriously in college?

Powell: No too seriously.

Kendall: Just around?

Powell: Yes. For all these dances of course you had to have a date. I would always have a date. There wasn't too much in those days of, you know, one boy friend for years. There were very few girls that had one permanent boy friend, or boys that had one permanent girl friend - very few. The pattern then was to really have as many dates as possible to gain a wider experience.

Kendall: Oh, I see. I missed that. [joint laughter] Were there black students in the Student Workers Federation?

Powell: No, not that I recall. And, as I mentioned before, I was not too active in that organization.

Kendall: I have heard of the difficulties of other people going to college from small towns, you know, a big frog in a little puddle, and then being a little frog in a big puddle, and you didn't have these problems of transition. Why do you think this was so easy for you and so hard for other people? Most other people?

Powell: I think everything that happened. I think this was a good suggestion on my aunt's part that my first year I stay there. It certainly made the commute no problem whatsoever. I would just walk there and walk back. That, I think, was very helpful. Then I think the fact that I had always known I was going to go there was

Powell: involved. Then I think the fact that this was a whole new world for me - just the physical plant there, the campus was so beautiful, the dreeks running right through, and hills behind it. It was just a gorgeous place. And then these general education courses that I had to take for the first two years just opened up fields that I had never known a thing about. I found them very, very interesting and challenging.

Kendall: When you were head of the Black Students Union did any students come to you with their problems?

Powell: Of a personal nature?

Kendall: Yes, of any nature.

Powell: Not that I recall. The only thing that would have bee involved would have been an organizational matter.

Kendall: Well, I was reading over one of the old years books, and in 1937 the Women's Activities Council Executive Committee said racial housing problems of university women had been the main concern of the group. Did the Black Students Union participate in trying to solve this problem at all? Do you remember the problem?

Powell: I remember the housing situation there. There were young black women from California valley towns had situations which were very common in those days where the reason they were able to go to UC Berkeley was that they would work in somebody's home. They would do the house work. Maybe prepare the meal. For that they would get room and board. Little money, but very, very little money. This was very, very common then and I know that they were taken advantage of in this situation. That was very common. Then there was another group of young black women who came from other states from fairly well to do families. They would stay in places like International House.And of course this cost money. Their families were able to afford it. In those days there were either the blacks who lived with their families at home. Many, many white students lived with their families at home. This is a

Powell: whole new development that we have seen in the country where it is better for the young person to break with the family at that time. So this was a problem - right.

Kendall: Did the Black Students Union do anything about it?

Powell: Not in those days, they didn't do anything about it. Then later on I don't remember being involved in that at that time either. Whether the situation had improved or not, I don't recall, but I do remember they had these young girls working in private homes receiving room and board.

Kendall: Do you remember Lucy Stebbins who was Dean of Women at that time?

Powell: Vaguely, yes.

Kendall: Did you ever go there with any of your problems?

Powell: No I never went there. I did go to a Dean of Women. I don't remember whether it was Lucy Stebbins or not. I had to get permission to go to Boston to attend this Democracy in Education Conference. And it was a patronizing interview, but I don't remember the name of that woman. But I was given permission. And the nature of the interview did not bother me too much because I knew that I wanted to receive permission, and that was really my only involvement with a Dean of Women. It might not have been Lucy Stebbins. I don't recall her name in that interview.

Kendall: That brings me to the next question. There probably wasn't too much overt discrimination, but covert?

Powell: Well, in the campus there wasn't any overt discrimination. The covert would be the job situation. That was another complaint. There was an office of employment and that office of employment only would send blacks out on so-called black jobs. So that was always discriminatory and always complained about. And that's where these jobs in private homes with room and board would come in. I am trying to think of what some of the young men did. They also had these same kinds of jobs. There was the Athletic Club in

Powell: Oakland which was a businessmen's club, and the boys could be bellboys, waiters (where they would have an all black staff). So there was that kind of disrimination. As far as the university itself, there certainly was no overt discrimination.

Kendall: This is a question I just don't know how to ask, but there must have been some special techniques for handling this sort of thing. Like this woman who patronized you. What techniques did you use to handle this type of thing? - to satisfy yourself in some way?

Powell: I just played the game because I wanted permission to go. I had this same experience with a Dean of Men there too. That was due to another situation where I was involved with him because of my role in in the Negro Students Club. "Jackie Robinson is one of my best friends." This kind of thing.

Kendall: You just ignore it then?

Powell: Well I certainly did ignore it Because what I was trying to achieve was much more important to me. Whatever it was (I forget what it was) but I know the club was very involved in major efforts, and those goals in my mind were always much more important than -

Kendall: What major efforts?

Powell: It is almost a blank now. I don't recall the details whatsoever.

Kendall: Would you say on a personal level?

Powell: These personal meetings were few and far between. The goal there - my interpretation was that these people wanted to (say this Dean of men) maintain a friendly relationship, possibly to win me over to his point of view. But I never thought that the personal relationships were that important with the administrators, let us say, because whatever we were doing - For instance the Associated Student Body would have its executive board meetings where

POWELL: where/if there were an important issue coming up I would go and speak. That's when I felt I could say what I wanted to say, and that's where I did it - where action could be taken by the official student group. But on the personal level I just always let it ride.

Kendall: What relationship did the Black Students Union have with the black community in Berkeley?

Powell: Well, they were involved in this social life.

Kendall: Were there any black businessmen then, where students could work for them? Was the community very large?

Powell: The East Bay Community was fairly large in those days. It was a new time in California. This World War II situation opened up California to the South. The shipyards in the North and the aircraft plants in the South. Many of these young men with whom I went to school, they were the first in their family ever to go to college. They became lawyers, doctors, dentists. Before World War II there wouldn't have been a black clientele for them, and it was just that timing where the population increased so.

Kendall: This didn't happen when you were in school, did it?

Powell: No. See, we were the group that it happened to. We were the group that graduated just before Pearl Harbor. And it was Pearl Harbor and the war effort on the part of the United States that opened up the shipyards, aircraft plants and brought this tremendous increase in black population.

End of first side of tape. Begin second side.

Kendall: You told me what jobs were given to minority women. What about women generally on the campus. What kind of jobs did they get?

Powell: Most of them got some kind of small clerical work. Many, many, of course, got restaurant work, particularly counter girls, this kind of thing. The job situation was not a good one for anybody. It was still pre-Pearl Harbor and there just weren't any jobs to talk about. The National Youth Administration provided

Powell: many students with work. And there race did not mean anything. There was no discrimination in NYA jobs.

Kendall: Was there a wage differential. Well men and women wouldn't have the same types of jobs. Would that be the answer?

Powell: Partly, yes. And I don't recall any discrimination. There would be young men who would be waiters also, and countermen. I don't recall any wage discrimination for the same job..No wage differential..

Kendall: Well, we did get to Alexander Balart and graduation. When you went to Alexander Balart, what did your family think of your going to work in a warehouse?

Powell: They never were happy about it. They understood the circumstances, though. I would have to go back to school one year to get a teacher's certificate, and that was quite expensive. And that this could be a temporary situation which I would be going and that eventually I would be going back and getting a teacher's certificate.

Kendall: How did you look at it?

Powell: Well, I had mixed feelings. I was interested to be in the world, pay my own way, earn my own living, this kind of thing. And it might have been in the back of my mind some day to do something, but no definite goals, and as time went on and I got more involved I enjoyed it. And it was easy to postpone, postpone, and postpone, and natural I guess. I think many people do this who plan to go back to college and time gets ahead of them and they don't make it.

Kendall: When you got your first paycheck, how did you feel?

Powell: Well, I had had other paychecks. But I don't remember anything specifically there. I do remember my first paycheck at Independent Paper Stock. I forget how much it was, but I immediately went out and bought a Model A Ford for thirty dollars. I know that just about took all my check. That is the kind of thing I enjoyed.

Kendall: Where did you live?

Powell: Here. I lived with my family at the same place.

Kendall: Did you pay board and room then?

Powell: No, I didn't pay board and room.

Kendall: Did your job change your status in the family?

Powell: Oh yes. I think so. You know that I wasmore one of the adults. This kind of thing. But, even with that, I was still always a child. I think many parents have this attitudetowards their children. Later in life this did change I would say. But in the beginning I was still in my early twenties.

Kendall: Did they ever monitor your life in any wau?

Powell: No really. They might have made efforts As I mentioned to you some time ago, when I decided I would not go to church again, this was a big disappointment to my mother, but she accepted my decision on it eventually. And I was willing to cooperate on many things too. I made compromises, and I guess they made compromises from their point of view.

Kendall: What did you do when you came home from wor, for instance? Did you help with dinner, or help participate in cleaning the house?

Powell: Well, mainly my mother did a great deal of that. The dinner preparations, she practically always did that. I would aid in some of the housework over week ends. I was involved in union committees, meetings, this kind of thing. I really was not a good assistant in the home in those days I don't think.

Kendall: Let me ask a general question. Tell me abour your first experience with the union. What were the logistics of your getting the job?

Powell: Well, codincidentally the Student Workers Federation had indicated that there were trying to secure a couple of jobs for UC students and I went up there. And at that time there were jobs on the board, and I went to Alexander Balart Company, which was a temporary job. Shortly after I was there there was a three day strike. I believe it was a three day strike, and we participated in that with picket duty every day.

Helen:

1) Life magazine

2) Family tree.

3)

Powell: I had thought previously that all ILWU members were extremely militant as the president of the Longshoremen's Union, Harry Bridges, was, which wasn't true. They were just ordinary people trying to make a living. I thought that the police were strikebreakers. This wasn't true. The policeman on the beat was a mounted policeman. He would bring us coffee every day. Here we were on strike against a coffee plant and this policeman would bring us coffee every day which I thought was very nice of him to do. So I got a very good education in that sense where some of my ideas were so incorrect. I was able to see that I had been wrong. Well in that strike I do remember the president of the Union was Maguire (Donald Maguire). I remember that was settled with women receiving less wages than men. Also at that time the Local 6 local was divided into a women's division and a men's division.

Kendall: We're going too fast. I want to know more of what your first job was like. What did the work involve?

Powell: The work involved putting coffee into coffee bags and then sealing them. That was for the women. Some men were roasters. Then there machines where the coffee cans - Alexander Balart did a tremendous business with the hotel and restaurant industry in San Francisco in those days, and the coffee actually was a very good coffee. It just disappeared from the scene over the years.

Kendall: Were you on a belt line?

Powell: No. There was no belt line there. I was at a table.

Kendall: How many women worked in the plant?

Powell: Maybe a couple of dozen were in the plant.

Kendall: How many women and how many men?

Powell: I would say fifty-fifty, roughly.

Kendall: How much did you earn?

Powell: I don't remember. It wasn't much.

Kendall: How did you spend the money?

Powell: Well, clothes. I was never a clothes horse, but I was self supporting, totally self supporting. Money would also go to the family. I did not pay board and room, never. But I would always give so much money towards buying food, paying bills, this kind of thing. But it went. The money went. It went mainly I guess for maintenance of the household and maintenance of myself. Pleqsure here and there.

Kendall: Was the work equally divided between the men and the women?

Powell: The duties were entirely different. They were called in those days "women's job" and"men's jobs" The women's jobs were totally unskilled. The men's jobs were skilled and perhaps semi-skilled, and also unskilled. The roasters of course were skilled jobs. Some of the machine operations with the cans would be skilled jobs.

Kendall: Could the women have done these jobs?

Powell: Certainly. With the machines easily. They don't take much training. Roasters probably take time for anybody to learn, but women could learn it just as well as the men I would presume.

Kendall: Did the women ever discuss this or have any feeling about this difference between women's and men's jobs?

Powell: At Alexander Balart I don't remember any discussion. I do at placed like Schenleys, and that was still pre World War II. Women were on belt lines there. There was discussion. Some of the men did what they call candling. Women could certainly do that. There certainly wasn't any militancy among most of the workers at Schenley's at that time. There was resentment over this wage differential which was resentment, but acceptance.. They thought their hands were tied because between the men's and the women's divisions of the local and then the president of the local exerting such influence in negotiations.

Kendall: You told me what you thought of your co-workers. What did they think of you? I mean as a college person. You mentioned that you had to go back and graduate.

Powell: They didn't know about that college situation. I was very well liked at Alexander Balart.I liked everyone there very much also. They were nice people. We got along very, very well with one another and enjoyed working with one another. But this was on a day-to-day work basis. It did not extend beyond the job. But very, very pleasant working relations.

Kendall: Did you find the work onerous?

Powell: I didn't find it onerous because I enjoyed working with people. That made it very pleasant because we would be talking to each other the whole time.we were doing this work. It was so routine that you could be tinking of other things, talking about other things.

Kendall: What did you talk about?

Powell: Oh it was small talk mainly - pleasantries, families, this kidd of thing - the union occasionally.

Kendall: Well you had been interested in political things. Was there every any politicaldiscussion at the table?

Powell: Not really.

Kendall: You didn't try to direct it in any direction then?

Powell: No. I thought I was the newcomer and they had been there many years before I got there & I should learn from them.

Kendall: Tell me about the strike now. How was it called?

Powell: I don't remember that. I know it was basically wages.

Kendall: Was it in the whole industry or just in your shop?

Powell: Oh no, it was the entire local 6.

Kendall: For the Master Contract?

Powell: Right.

Kendall: And what did you do in the strike?

Powell: Just picket duty.

Kindall: In front of the place where you worked?

Powell: Right.

Kendall: How did you feel about this?

Powell: Well, it was a new experience for me to be involved in a strike and it certainly wasn't what I had anticipated, particularly with this mounted policeman. The settlement I thought was terrible, because of the discrimination against the women in the settlement where they actually received less as a gain than the men did.

Kendall: How did the other women feel about this?

Powell: There was a certain amount of resentment, and apparently it might have been going on even before I became a member of the union, because it was taken for granted almost, even though it was resented. There was no reason why that should have happened; that the strike should have continued longer. I do remember that - until the women got the same increase that the men received.

Kendall: You were not a book member at the time?

Powell: No.

Kendall: Were you allowed to attend the union meetings?

Powell: No. We had our own separate women's division meetings.

Kendall: Well, did the women ever bring this up at the women's meetings, this disparity?

Powell: Yes. I believe it was mention. Also mentioned was the fact that they did not want a women's division; that they would be able to do more for women be being a united local instead of the two separate divisions.

Kendall: Let me get on to this first. I just want to ask this one question. At this time in your life Pearl Harbor happened, didn't it?

Powell: Yes.

Kendall: What was your gut reaction to the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

Powell: Co-incidentally, I was in Mexico, that week end. (laughter)

Kendall: So that's how you spent part of your money!

Powell: A friend came out from New York and we decided we would go to Mexico just for four days. A young woman who had been an old family friend, and about my age, a little older. We decided we would go to Mexico and we went to Ensenada by bus. At that time

Powell: it was a lovely fishing village, practically no tourists, all Mexicans then. Now it is, from what I understand, strictly an American tourist village. And we stayed at a motel. And we had gone out to a restaurant for dinner and as we came back we could hear the radio, the car radio,of a person in the room next to us. There waa sort of a car port. This thing was just blasting away, which was unique because that hadn't happened since we had been there. Then all of a sudden we got the words Pearl Harbor bombed, and that's what the story was about, and it just kept saying Pearl Harbor bombed, and we just looked at each other - Pearl Harbor, Pearl Harbor - that's Hawaii, in utter amazement. So then we went out and we heard all these people (I understood Spanish) everbody was just talking about Pearl Harbor beingbombed. Then when we went back, long before we got to Los Angeles, there was a blackout, soldier boarded our bus, went through it, then got off. It was really an experience and we knew we were at war.

Kendall: You were still interested in the peace movement at that time, or were you?

Powell: Yes.

Kendall: Well, how did your mind make the transition from being interested in the peace movement? Did you accept

Powell: the fact that the U.S. had to go to war then? Absolutely.

Kendall: What made you change your mind?

Powell: The nature of the attack I would say that Japan had attacked the United States. Japan was aligned with Germany and Italy, which made it a three way deal.

Kendall: I am trying to figure out - you were very much against war, and this is what changed your mind, but Hitler attacking England didn't change your mind. Did you feel you were for peace or for isolation?

Powell: Well, I don't know. When I was in college at that time some of the thinking (and I was certainly involved in it) we never would have defined it as

Powell isolatism at all. We really thought we were very much so. On the other hand we were against (at the same time I should say) war. However I think Pearl Harbor made it impossible to maintain either an isolationist position or one hundred percent peace position. Even to this day I have very ambiguous feelings. I definitely am not an isolationist. I definitely am against war. However I just think that at certain times war or rebellion become absolutely necessary in the sense that so many of the oppressive groups will not make adequate compromises that would eliminate rebellion or war. In rebellion or war I am talking about killing human beings.to achieve something. So that I still have to this day very ambiguous feelings. I think the American Revolution was necessary, I really do, even though people were killed. One of the worse crimes in the world is killing human beings, but some of these events that take place in history have impressed me. The same thing with the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, even though, say in the French Revolution, there were many excesses after the revolution, historically I think, since the forces in power at the time would make no compromises, it became necessary, which is unfortunate. And I don't like to think of myself as saying well there are just and unjust wars. That is why I am using that word ambiguous. I don't have it clearly in my own mind, except I do hate war, but not to the extent of being an isolationist. The world is one world, and that changes are going to come in later years where we are really going to become one people on earth.

Kendall: We can get into what happened later on this because we have a section here on the war. So let's stop now and go back to your chronological activities in the union because it will fit in there. Were you working at Alexander Balart when you first got involved in union activities?

Powell: Probably to the extent that I went to union meetings of the women's division, and the strike, this kind of thing.

Kendall: Well, tell me what was a women's meeting like? Who chaired it? What was talked about?

Powell: Well going back (I forget all the names) there were two women who were extremely active, Aune Makela and Frances McAuliffe. I believe it was Aune who chaired the meetings.And what it was basically was just a rubber stamp of whatever had happened at the men's division meeting. It was strictly union business, reading of the last minutes, last meeting's minutes, new business, some discussion, voting, end of meeting.

Kendall: Did men ever attend women's meetings?

Powell: Not that I remember.

Kendall: Even union officials?

Powell: I don't recall. They might have though.

Kendall: What came up under new business, say?

Powell: Well, say in a strike situation it would be a voting on it. The new business would always have something to do with the union.

Kendall: Did the women's meeting ever initiate anything for the men's meeting to approve of?

Powell: Not that I recall. The one thing that was going on (very much so) in the women's division was they wanted the elimination of the women's division. That was very, very big. They certainly were in favor of that.

Kendall: Explain this dual set up now.

Powell: What its origin was I have absolutely no idea, and I was dumfounded when I went into that union and discovered it. Just dumfounded that there would be such a thing. As I say I always thought this union was such a wonderful union and it wasn't that way at all, at least to my way of thinking.

Kendall: How did the dual set up work. Did it go all the way through. That is if there were men and women in a plant, did you have a steward and a stewardess?

Powell: Yes. At least that's the way it was in the plants that I worked in. Now whether it was for that reason I don't remember. But probably that was the reason because even afterwards (the reason I say I don't know that) is that even afterwards, long after the women's division was eliminated and Local 6 became one local the practice still continued of a male steward and a female stewardess. Now during the World War II days many's the time where there would be a woman steward in the plant. But again that could be because there weren't too many men around because so many had gone into the armed services. But I don't remember in the World War II days there being a so-called sex divisionon steward and stewardess. It might have happened that way.

Kendall: Well, what about committees. How did that work? The publicity committee, say. How did a woman get on the publicity committee?

Powell: Well, I don't know because shortly after I became involved in the union the women's division was eliminated, and everything that I was involved in was men and women. It was one united local, men and woemn. We all met together. No more separatism. Everything was men and women. And it worked our very well. Whatever the bugaboos had been abouit certainly did not materialize.

end of tape #4 in series

Kendall: As long as we are talking about this dual set up, how did it stop? What happened to make the women's group not separate from the men any more?

Powell: I don't remember. I do remember that there was always this tremendous concern on the part of the women in the women's division that they wanted that women's division eliminated; that they wanted to be full members (they were full members technically), to be equals. And they wanted to meet as one local and not as a divided local on a segregated basis. So what must have happened would be that finally the male officials realized that they better do something about it. The men at that time I believe outnumbered the women numerically - that they would still be able to control the situation. These are all presumptions. But it did come about very quickly after I entered the union.

Kendall: You were first working at Alexander Balart and you got involved in union activities because in the strike and so forth. When you first got involved were other women active in the local outside of this Aune and Francis?

Powell: Well, Aune and Francis were extremely involved - very, very active, and the leaders of the women's group, very much so. Very capable women. There were other women on the periphery whose names I don't remember, but who were involved also.

Kendall: What forms did your involvement take?

Powell: A great deal of it was on a fun level, shall I say. I was very involved in the whole sports program, a member of the basketball team. San Francisco at that time had all kinds of inter-league play, all over the City. I guess the department of recreation must have been involved in it. But there were Local 6 women's teams, Local 6 men's teams, basketball, vollyball, baseball(softball).

Kendall: How did you find out about them?

Powell: Probably union meetings. Union meetings were informative.

Kendall: ~~Well,~~ did you make friends within the union outside of your work place then?

Powell: Oh yes, to a degree.

Kendall: Were there any minority women in the local you made friends with?

Powell: ~~Well,~~ not at that time because there weren't any minority women. World War II changed everything, with the influx of blacks into San Francisco and at that time black women became members of the union. But there weren't any to speak of then, minorities. The minorities then were different ethnic groups - minorities not necessarily numerically, such as the Italian-Americans, some Mexican-Americans, Very few Asians were involved in Local 6.

Kendall: Well, now that you mentioned Asians, let's get into the business of the Japanese concentration camps. Did you have any feeling about this at all?

Powell: Yes. I was very opposed to it. I had two very good Japanese girl friends.

Kendall: From where, school?

Powell: One was from school. One from Cal.,and the other was married to a friend of mine. They both went to Tanforan. The one who was married to a friend of mine, she was a very good friend of mine because the friend that she married was not a very stable person, and they had a baby, and the husband was not a responsible man. So she and I became very close because of the nature of her marriage. And I remember visiting her at Tanforan. That was just a horrible experience seeing all these Japanese there behind the fances, American-Japanese. I was just totally opposed to that, always. Just thought it was terrible. Then through the years I lost contact with both of these women and after World War II ended I never heard from them again, and I am sure time was involved and the fact that we were young and the young are neglectful of correspondence, I would be guilty of that myself. But I always have wished that I could have maintained contact with them, and

Powell: certainly would have unless it had been for the concentration camps.

Kendall: Did the union have a policy on that?

Powell: I don't remember the union having any policy on this. I don't recall any official discussion on this in the union, and I am sure I would have. You know it must never have come up in the form of a resolution for discussion from the floor. The union's policy was at that time total all out effort to win World War II. That I remember very, very much. And they did. They had a tremendous war effort going on.

Kendall: Did you ever have any problems on the job that you had to take to the union? Or to the steward on the job?

Powell: I am trying to think. I don't recall. I don't think I did.

Kendall: Outside of the sports group, what other union activities did you participate in in your early years in the union?

Powell: In the early years I don't think I did too much. At this Independent Paper Stock I did become the stewardess, eventually, not in the beginning, and that got me involved in the Stewards' Committee of the local itself, so I was involved in that. I also was a member of the Executive Board of Local 6, but I don't remember the dates on that.

Kendall: Let's see. Do you remember the first time you ever got up on the floor and spoke?

Powell: Not at all. Not at all.

Kendall: All right, there's another question. This group that you associated with during high school and college, where you had this social life, going to dances and things, did you maintain your friendship with them while you were active in the union?

Powell: To a degree. Before. I did before I went to Los Angeles. When I went to Los Angeles (I must have been there close to two years) and again this youthful neglect, I did lose contact. I never wrote

Powell: letters to anybody to speak of. When I came back I was out of that social life to a certain degree.

Kendall: How did your parents feel about your being active in the union?

Powell: They had mixed feelings about it.

Kendall: Did your mother ever talk to you about it?

Powell: No really. I knew that she would have loved to have seen me be a teacher. On the other hand she liked what I was doing as far as, oh, some of these things. She liked my point of view, but she didn't like me to be involved. She liked the ideals, but not the necessary action to achieve the ideals. So we were close that way. She knew that the decision had to be made. But you know I had my life to lead.

Kendall: Did you ever feel you were making sacrifices in order to be a union activist?

Powell: Never. I enjoyed it, and thought it was some kind of a contribution, small though it might be.

Kendall: I want to get here your job history a little bit. Tell me what jobs you worked in just before you went to LA. I mean your job history up until the time you went to Los Angeles.

Powell: I started in at Alexander Balart Coffee, was there for two or three months. Then went to Schenley's.

Kendall: Why did you go to Schenley's?

Powell: Well, probably I was laid off at Alexander Balart due to lack of work. Probably was hired because there was a rush period, ~~this kind of thing~~. This was very common in Local 6 jobs in those days.

Kendall: Then what did you do when you were laid off? How did you go about getting another job?

Powell: Well, you would go to the hall and put your name on a list. You would be at the end of the line and work yourself up, and eventually you would get to the top of the list and be sent out on a job.

Kendall: Was there any arrangement like they have at the Longshire hiring hall about the hours you had worked before so that there would be an equalization of hours? In other words, if you had been on a job

Kendall: two days and were laid off you would still go to the end of the list, and if you had been on a job two years you would go to the end of the list?

Powell: As far as I recall that's the way it was.

Kendall: Was there any feeling of inequity about this?

Powell: ~~Well~~, I don't remember. At that time the people who had been on the jobs two years weren't the ones being laid off at that time. This did happen some years later. I am thinking of companys like Western Sugar where five hundred women were laid off.

Kendall: ~~Okay~~. Let's go on then. So then you went to the union and got another job. They dispatched you. How did they dispatch you?

Powell: At that time it was strictly a clerical operation, and one assumed that you went to the bottom of the list and rose to the top. Later on there was a plug board type situation where there was a plug with your book number on it, and the plug was in full view, and you could see it. That way you could check on it every day.

Kendall: And how long did you stay at Schenley's then?

Powell: Again, probably two or three months.

Kendall: And what did you do there?

Powell: There I was on the belt line putting labels on the bottles, sometimes sealers on the bottles, some little gadget that would go on top of the cork. That kind of thing.

Kendall: Well, how did that job differ from your job at Alexander Balart?

Powell: Well, there was less time to socialize on the belt line. It was all fairly well mechanized with a time system because as the bottles would go down the belt then they had to be taken off at the end and put into cartons. Men were doing that. So if anything went wrong the entire belt had to be stopped. The entire operation had to be stopped. Time lost, money lost for the company. So although the job was extremely monotonous there really wasn't much time

Powell: to chit-chat. On the belt line you always had to be aware of that next bottle coming down and you were always trying not to have belt break downs.

Kendall: Was a speed up ever instituted in this type of work?

Powell: I would think this was a kind of a speedup in itself. While I was there,no they never tried to make the belt go any faster than it went when I got there.

Kendall: In reverse, did you ever try to make the belt go any slower?

Powell: No, but I would certainly look upon it as a speed up operation. It was very tight. And what would happen on this thing if you weren't very careful and fast at the same time a bottle would fall off and break. ~~Well~~, that would stop the whole line. Everything would stop. Right. So people were interested though in doing good work.

Kendall: What was the difference between men's jobs and women's jobs at that plant?

Powell: ~~Well~~, the men were the ones who put the bottles in the cartons. The women were the ones on the belt. The men put them in the cartons and were the freight handlers, did everything else except the belt line work.

Kendall: The same question again. Could women have done men's work, or vice versa, on this job?

Powell: Oh, I would presume so. Certainly.

Kendall: Was there ever any question of a man working on the belt line?

Powell: No in those days. Years later, with World War II, when because so many men went into the armed services, men's jobs were opened up to women, such as order fillers, checkers, occasionally freight handlers, rarely redeiving clerks and shipping clerks, but many, many of the men's jobs were opened up to women. ~~Well~~ at that time many people said, ~~well~~ why can't men work on the belt lines also, if they want to. And this would be particularly good for older men who were

Powell: having a difficult time handling freight. Nothing was ever done about that, ~~and I would think it was~~ (this is strictly personal) my personal opinion is the thinking was that these belt jobs would be too menial for men to do. I don't know if that's true, but that's the way I would interpret that. ~~That~~ They never did a thing about getting men to do some of the jobs that women had been doing, particularly the belt line jobs that were called "women's jobs".

Kendall: And then, why did you leave Schenley's?

Powell: ~~Oh~~ Schenley's. Probably the same kind of situation, due to lack of work. Hired because there was an excess of work.

Kendall: Then you went back to the union hall, put in your name, and got sent to Independent paper.

Powell: Yes.

Kendall: How did you get sent? Did you hang around the hall?

Powell: No really. I didn't. I could be phoned, or I could check the next day. I would go down every day.

Kendall: But they would phone you if you weren't there?

Powell: Yes.

Kendall: I see. What was IndependentPaper Stock like?

Powell: Well, it was one of the - it had the reputation of being one of the worst places in the union only bedause of the nature of the work. The nature of the work was they were a company that sent paper waste products to Auburn, I believe, to be re-made into paper. So that the two scavanger companies of San Francisco took all their products there. This would be not only from homes, but from the department stores, the offices in the city, where you would have cartons, different kinds of paper waste, manila paper, this kind of thing, but on that belt would come horrible things also, sometimes from garbage cans. And this is why it had this bad reputation ~~that~~ it was just not a pleasant place to work in because of the nature of the business; that you were working with people's garbage cans, really.

Kendall: How did the job function? What did you do, what did the

Kendall: men do?

Powell: Well, again the women were on the belt line, and the men did all the other jobs. On the belt line - well the scavangers would bring their truckloads and leave them. The men would unload the trucks. They had a process then where they would put this into some kind of facility on an upper floor which would send it down to a lower floor, a middle floor, on the belts. There were several belts, about three or four belts. Women would be lined up on each side. Then there (I forget what they called them) some kind of cavities or holes which went down to the first floor. And women would be working there with gloves, leather gloves, and segregating these materials into various catagories. There would be catagories for cartons, catagories for certain kinds of paper, and qualities of paper. Those were really the main interests. That really was what was to be gained from the whole process. And then there were just plain garbage. The plain garbage was permitted to run down to the end of the belt to some container on the first floor. That would be carted away by men. All these cartons then would be baled by men. All the paper would be baled by men. That was very heavy work. I don't think women could have done that kind of thing.without greater mechanization. It was extremely heavy, these huge, huge, huge bales. Then these would be prepared for shipment to AAuburn to be re-made into paper.

Kendall: Well, how many women worked there, and how many men?

Powell: Approximately, memory fails me, but I would say fifty—fifty, and probably twenty to twenty five men and twenty to twenty five women.

Kendall: Did you get a chance to talk on this belt line?

Powell: Yes, to a degree, because many's the time there wouldn't be anything on the belt, while something was being prepared to put on the belt.

Kendall: What did you talk about?

Powell: It was small talk. A lot of it was what I guess you would call women talk in those days - what did

Powell: you have for dinner last night, and how did you cook such and such. My daughter this, and my son this, and my husband this. And then union matters too.

Kendall: Well, how did you get to be stewardess?

Powell: Well, it was an elected job. I don't know if that means anything, however. I don't recall the details, but I do know that in some houses people were elected stewardess because many people weren't interested in the job. It did take a certain amount of time. It took time on the job. It took time at meetings. And many people really weren't interested in giving up that kind of time. Union meetings were more or less compulsory unless one paid a fine, and people did not want to pay the fine, so they would usually go to one union meeting a month, and they thought that that was enough; that they worked every day, and so forth and so on. So I was elected, but whether by default or not, I don't recall.

Kendall: ~~What~~ Was there a steward there too?

Powell: Yes. Right.

Kendall: What did you do on the job as stewardess?

Powell: There were little things that might come up. I don't relish everything I did do as stewardess. I made one mistake, a serious mistake there which I shouldn't have. But I was too green to realize it at the time. We were in the World War II effort and of course men were being sent away (of course not being sent away, were leaving) being drafted, or enlisting in the armed services, and there was always a gift collection. Oh, I wasn't stewardess then, ~~that was at -~~ The Stewardess at that time took up a collection for the supervisor, and I didn't think that we should be making a contribution to a supervisor, I thought that was a non-union philosophy, and I forget all the details, but that was involved in it I know.

Kendall: Why do you think that was wrong now?

Powell: I thought it was wrong at the time, not immediately at the time, but because of what evolved from it.

good follow-up

Powell: I forget all the details of that, but I know I wound up preparing charges against this woman. This was one incident involved in the charges, but there were others also where I thought that she was too close to the company, and it was wrong because many of the women there liked her for other reasons. I wasn't thinking of the total unity of the house. That's why it was wrong. I could have, I should have done something else in a different way to have tried to work closer with this woman instead of alienating her. I really alienated that woman, and I should not have done so.

Kendall: How did you become stewardess then. Did she quit as a result of these charges?

Powell: Oh no, no. She stayed on. How I became stewardess I don't remember. She did leave eventually, but I don't think it was due to that. There were other things going on there too. This woman was not a good stewardess in the sense that she really was very company minded. I forget the nature of some of the other things, but I do remember, oh say, a plant accident - but I don't remember the accident itself - where she testified in court for the company instead of for the union member who had been hurt. And I testified for the union member. None of this might have evolved if I hadn't alienated that woman. And many of the women who worked there who liked me personally always remembered that. There was a change in our relationship although we still were friendly because they had other ties to this woman too. So I learned a lesson.

Kendall: When you were stewardess your job was what then, specifically?

Powell: Mainly seeing that the contract was abided by; taking up any beefs* or grievances that would come up.

Kendall: How did you take them up?

Powell: Usually you would set up an appointment with the employer. You would have your meeting first with the women, discuss what should be done. They would

* EXPLAIN "BEEF"

Powell: make a decision. Usually the decision was that the stewardess, possibly with a small committee, would make an appointment with the employer's representative, I should say, generally the supervisor, to work things out. And generally we would win these. If we didn't we would call a business agent down to assist us. But over the years our record would be that we would usually win these things. They weren't major items, small things.

Kendall: Like what?

Powell: The proper amount of time for a break, or somebody having too many breaks,but for a special reason possibly, but this should be considered okay if there were, you know, extenuating circumstances, which would happen rarely. Nothing grave or great.

End first side tape #5

Begin second side of tape #5

WOMEN'S INTERESTS DURING WW II

Kendall: You know the first mention I saw of you in the Dispatcher was very funny. It was just about this period when you were the shop steward. You set up an air raid warden set up. Do you remember about that?

Powell: Vaguely. I just remember that the union was doing these kinds of things, and that I was involved. Details escape me.

Kendall: There was something about setting up a cot or something so that women could sleep overnight or something, and I wondered about that.

Powell: Probably,but the details really escape me.

Kendall: Another thing about the women then. In the Dispatcher there was a special page for women. Strangely enough it had sewing hints and recipe hints and things like this, but very little about women in the union on that page. Was it a page for Auxiliary members or was it a page for union members too?

Powell: Probably both. There was a very close tie up then with the Women's Auxiliary. I remember them being involved in many of the activities, particularly the strike activities. Many, many things they would lend a helping hand to the local itself. And I think also

Powell: they were seeking some kind of identification outside of the house. Then it was a mutual thing.

Kendall: Did the women read this page? Did you read it?

Powell: No. I don't recall the page even, and I don't recall any specific discussions on it. I do remember this kind of talk being very common on most of my jobs. Not sewing so much, but cooking was always a a big subject of conversation and recipies, and there were so many of these Italian-American women in that union. And occasionally I would be a guest in their homes, and the food, my god, it was just like (what do the gods eat?) ambrosia. Oh, delicious, and they really cooked heavenly stuff, and they grew all their own herbs and vegetables in their big back yards. Cooking, food, recipies, always big conversation on most of the jobs I worked on.

Kendall: How long were you stewardess there?

Powell: I would think maybe six months, eight months, something like that.

Kendall: Okey, when you were stewardess did the women even come to you with their personal problems?

Powell: No. These women were the kind of women I would say who would not want to do that. They would want to work out their own personal problems.

Kendall: How old were you as compared to the other women on the job?

Powell: Say there were twenty to twenty five women - a third of them must have been fifties, sixties. Another group thirties - forties. I probably was the baby in that group. There was an older group of women there.

Kendall: That could have been one of the reasons then.

Powell: Yes.

Kendall: You were laid off there and went to Schwabher-Frey even though you were stewardess?

Powell: I wasn't laid off. I quit because the union opened up men's jobs to women, and I had always been interested in equal pay for equal work, so I jumped at the opportunity.

 A MAN'S JOB FOR HELENE

Kendall: Why did they open men's jobs for women?

Powell: So many men were going to participate in the war, in some branch of the armed services, either through being drafted or through enlisting.

Kendall: Who determined whether they were men's jobs or women's jobs?

Powell: Well, this was all in the contract - not lined up as such - not described as such - but this had been the historical background of the jobs in that local, that men were the order fillers, checkers, packers, receiving clerks, and shipping clerks, and women did the belt line jobs. Probably originally the employer had made the determination long before unionization occured, and that the union accepted the set up.

Kendall: I see. So you quit and got dispatched to Schwabacher Frey.

Powell: Yes.

Kendall: What did you do there?

Powell: There I was an order filler in the toy department.

Kendall: And was it a particularly difficult job?

Powell: Oh, no. There wasn't anything to it at all.

Kendall: Well, how many people worked at Schwabacher Frey?

Powell: There were several people at Schwabacher Frey. However there were two separate buildings. One was the toy department. And one was the stationery department. So most of the local 6 members worked in stationery. There were in another building, so I didn't see them. I worked in the toy department - another building - another street - and there weren't many employees there - half a dozen. STEWARD'S COMMITTEE

Kendall: Well, now, in the course of time now you were a stewardess, you were on the stewards committee. What did the stewards committee do?

Powell: Oh, the stewards committee was primarily leadership training, indirectly. They would discuss situations in many of the houses. And although it was structured basically what it was serving for was a leadership group. The collection of dues. Sometimes the stewards would collect dues. Stewards would certainly act in the role of trying to publicize certain events that

Powell: the union was interested in and would be planning discussions on. For instance there was a move to have union members really voluntarily work for time and a half on Saturdays to help the war effort, regardless of the enterprise that production would help the American war effort. And where there might be feelings by certain members that they really would prefer the leisure time the stewards would try to have little house meetings to give the position on what the union leadership was thinking about. How to handle beefs. How to handle grievances. This kind of function mainly.

Kendall: Well, you were involved in sports. This time was going on now. This was almost a couple of years after you had joined the union. We won't go into the sports thing so much although you can tell me a little bit about it, but what other things were you involved in in the union? Was your sphere of activity growing larger all the time?

Powell: Yes. To a degree. However I don't remember at which time I got involved on that Executive Board, but I think that was post Los Angeles.

Kendall: What were your other spheres of activity in the union?

Powell: Not too many actually. Speaking at membership meetings occasionally on union issues, Being the steward on the job. Going to the stewards committee. Bringing that information back. Conducting house meetings for reports to the members. That was about the extent of it.

Kendall: Then when you went to Schwabacher Frey you were no longer a stewardess though.

Powell: No.

Kendall: So then what did you do? You must have done something.

Powell: I'm trying to think if I was a steward there for a while. I think I was a steward there for a while. Again it probably was by default.

Kendall: Were you representing both men and women then?

Powell: Just the small toy department, and I'm not positive about that. I know I had a union leadership role

Powell: in that house and that makes me think that I must have been the steward of that group.

Kendall: What do you mean by union leadership role?

Powell: Having the meetings with the employer's representative on any problem that might come up. And I was involved in that. Therefore I think I must have been the steward for the toy department; and if true that was probably an election by default.

Kendall: Don't be so modest.

Powell: No, truly.

Kendall: Do you remember anything about the meetings. What I would like to know is how the men on the job treated you, both the union men and the employers who were men I presume.

Powell: ~~Well~~, for a while I was the only woman there, and I was treated very well. I was an order filler. The men were very helpful in teaching me the job. And teaching involved learning ~~involves~~ mainly where everything is located, and the numbers, the code numbers for the items, ~~this kind of thing~~. The men really were very, very nice. I got along with them well. The employer's representative was also very nice to me. I happen to be one of those people who always was a good worker. I always was able to produce and I was interested in it. I really believed the philosophy - a good day's work for a good day's pay.* When I received the offer to go to Los Angeles as an organizer the employer's representative really tried to talk me out of it, but I wouldn't accept. Also I had been offered the job of foreman of the toy department. The foreman we had had a drinking problem, and I am sure that that was the motivation there. And I was never interested in being a foreman or a forelady. Even though foremen and foreladies were members of the union they were always a buffer between management and the union members. Frequently foremen and foreladies became unconsciously management representatives. ~~It~~ The job was very, very

* AFL SLOGAN FOR YEARS WAS "A FAIR DAYS WORK FOR A FAIR DAYS PAY."

Powell: difficult because they realized they were caught in the middle, management constantly saying more production, more production, more production, and union members not wanting to kill themselves with production. FIRST JOB ITS ORGANIZER

Kendall: Let's go on then to your being appointed as International Representative to Los Angeles. I have a date here, the 7th of May, 1943, there was a picture of you in the Dispatcher getting advice from Goldblatt and Paton*. It was a good picture too. Why did they pick you?

Powell: Revels Cayton was involved. He and Gene Paton were friendly to a degree.

Kendall: How did you know Revels Cayton?

Powell: Oh, I had known him for years and years and years. He was a friend of my uncle's. I had known him throughout my college life, and I'm sure that Revels talked this up that, you know, this would be a good deal. Now he might have been thinking also of my own personal growth - to go to another city, and this kind of thing.

Kendall: What was he then? He was an official in a union wasn't he?

Powell: I don't remember. He had been an officials of various unions, and at that time I believe he was involved in union work in Los Angeles, and that this was probably part of his motivation in the Los Angeles union. I am trying to think of - he held so many jobs there he might have been with the State CIO at that time. I am trying to think of the title of his job in Los Angeles. He was in Los Angeles at the time, because originally I lived with him and his wife, not in the same house, But on the property that they rented there was a small three room cottage which I rented.

- - - - - - - - - - -

* Eugene Paton and Louis Goldblatt. Both members of Local 6 I.L.W.U. and both officials in the International. Goldblatt had been, or was at the time, an official in the State CIO also.

Kendall: When they picked you, what did they do? What happened? Did they call you to the office? What was the conversation?

Powell: The conversation was with Gene Paton, and he just indicated that they would like me to go to Los Angeles as an International Representative; that there was a tremendous amount of organizing to be done; that Local 26, the Warebouse Local in Los Angeles, had tremendous organizing jobs to undertake; some of them new plants having to do with World War II, new plants in the sense of World War II that they had just been founded and that their operations were based on materials that would be involved for World War II. There were many drug houses down there, many what they called bag plants actually made bags or sacks. Many, many plants unorganized that they thought Local 26 could gain membership and organize.

Kendall: What was your reaction to it?

Powell: I was interested. I was interested in going to another city, seeing another city, getting involved in an organizing job, seeing how that would be. I was interested.

Kendall: What did you say then?

Powell: I said yes.

Kendall: Immediately?

Powell: Yes.

Kendall: What did your parents think about your leaving home?

Powell: By that time my father had died, so it was just my mother. And she accepted it as part of the process of growing up.

Kendall: Did she give you ady advice?

Powell: We were in very close touch, and we never phoned, but I did write, visited frequently. My mother and sister would come visit me for vacations, a week or two.

Kendall: What I am trying to say is this mother-daughter -

Powell: No, no. My mother knew Revels and, you know, thought that he would be looking out for my welfare. There

Powell: was this aspect that she thought I was in good hands. We would be in close touch. My mother and I would be in close touch.

Kendall: This picture of your getting advice from Paton and Goldblatt, did they actually give you any?

Powell: Well certainly Goldblatt didn't. Paton might have had a few words to say, but mainly, you know, it would have just been chit-chatting - oh now you're off to the big city, Southern California, this kind of stuff. Not real advice - no.

Kendall: Did you go off in a flurry of anything. Did anybody give you a good bye party? How did you leave?

Powell: Total oblivion. I forget. No I don't remember any good bye parties.

Kendall: Well, tell me a little bit. I am interested. When you went to LA what happened? I mean tell me the story of how you started.

Powell: Well, I was received very warmly by the Local 26 people, and I guess they were glad to get another person to help in the organizing. There was a tremendous amount of organizing to be done there. And warehouse locals always have seemed to have been grab bags anyway. Any enterprise that does not have a specific - mainly they are unskilled, and then enterprises that have no place else to go in the regular channels of unionism, usually these would be warehouse jobs. Local 26 was in the CIO building, a tremendous building, a huge building where all the CIO unions had offices. This was a very interesting experience for me because I met so many people from different unions, just all of them. And there was a warm feeling among everyone there that they were all trying to improve conditions for workers. At that time of course the aircraft plants had also been built and were in operation. And I guess that was the Automobile Workers that were organizing the aircraft plants. I would get involved in many of these others things too. Different unions would voluntarily assist other unions in big

Powell: organizingdrives - say some of the aircraft plants. When an election would be coming up many of us would go out with the last minute handing out of leaflets. So I enjoyed all of this extra curricular activity shall we call it.

Kendall: Well, I want to know how you do organizing - what happens?

Powell: My first organizing job there, which did not turn out to be successful, I became a plant in a Local 26 union plant, in a company called the Aero Reclamation Company. This was a plant, this was a company that retrievedsurplus screws mainly, but other items that were thrown out from the aircraft plants. Two brothers founded this company, and one must have been a genius in the field of invention because he would devise machinery that would reclaim these materials. Then the company would sell them to the aircraft plants. And I guess this was a mutual program also where the aircraft companies were glad to have a facility that could be involved in a certain amount of reclamation that they could buy back and use and not have to buy the new items. And, on the other hand, the company where the brother invented all this machinery to do this could also be a profit-making company for the two brothers.

The bulk of the employees were black women from the deep South who had come out to Southern California because of the stories about jobs being available. The jobs were mainly unskilled jobs in the sorting for sizes, types, this kind of thing.

So my first organizing job was to go in there as a worker, not mention that I was a union organizer, and try to get the employees interested in the benefits of unionism. Again, because of my facility for working, my philosophy of giving a fair days work for a fair days pay is what we called it then,

Powell: the management liked my work. The management liked the quality of my work. And they would put me on a new invention and I would learn it, so ~~that~~ eventually I could handle all the machines. In the meantime I had started surreptitiously my campaign with the women to get them involved in thinking about becoming union members and the union having the plant organized. ~~And~~ we held several meetings. Ultimately I was discovered, however, by the employers and was fired immediately and there wasn't anything to do about getting reinstated. It was certainly against the employers' benefit to have me ~~and~~, and I had served my purpose as far as getting the women to think about joining the union.

Through a year or so we did get many, many, many of the women to sign up as union members, but we never got enough where we could have won an election. The employers started to intimidate these women. They would fire them sometimes. We were in no position to really get their jobs back for them. And it became a small war. In the meantime I then started being involved in organizing other plants. And at some time we gave up on Aero Reclamation.

Last question!

Kendall: Here's a quesion that just comes up in my mind. Here you were - a young woman raised in San Jose, but still compared to women in the south you were an urban woman and they were from the deep South. Did you have any cultural differences? Did they accept you?

Powell: I was well accepted. There might have been cultural differences, but basically it was a person-to-person relationship, and I think this holds true in all fields. I know what they say about cultural differences, particularly in marriages that it is the cultural differences that are the most difficult thing to handle, in a marriage situation. And this might be true about marriage. But on jobs I have found that it's basically people to people. In travelling

Powell: it's people to people, in foreign countries. And there is just so much of this good feeling in the whole world. And I was accepted so readily wherever I went. And these people also were accepted by me. Some you might like personally. Some you might dislike personally, but that certainly was never a factor. Most of these people I recall were trying to improve their status in life, improve their conditions of living. That's something one has in common right off the bat.

Kendall: Did you have a problem getting a job at the plant, or did you just walk in and ask for it?

Powell: Just walked in and asked for it. No problem.

Kendall: One other question I want to ask you; did you get paid as much as the men organizers?

Powell: Yes.

Kdndall: Well, good for the local.

Powell: See, it wasn't the local. It was the international.

Kendall: When you were working on the job, did you get paid by the international aswll as the employer?

Powell: Yes.

Kendall: Well, I was going to ask a question about why they wanted to organize this particular plant, but you have answered that.

Powell: There were many, many employees there and their conditions really would have beneffited with a good union contract.

Kendall: I got the impression from the paper that Aero Reclamation was organized.

Powell: Well it might have been organized in the sense that there were many union members signed up, but there was never a union contract won there. Maybe later, maybe years later.

Kendall: It was around this time. It was constantly in the paper about Aero Reclamation, and meetings and stuff like that.

Powell: Yes - a tremendous amount of activity - tremendous activity.

Kendall: I would likt to know a little more about it.

Ken: Helen, we were talking about Aero Reclamation, but I skipped over your having moved away from home. I would like to know a little more about this, because it was the first time you were ever away from your family; and although you were with Revels who was, I suppose, to be like a father to you - how did you feel about moving away from home for the first time?

Pow: Well, I enjoyed it, and anticipated the move and liked the independence. I kept in close contacct with the family.

Ken: You lived in a small house, you said?

Pow: It was a three room cottage. It had a huge living room, tiny kitchen, a bathroom.

Ken: Did you set up housekeeping?

Pow: Oh, yes. I had a table, one of those redwood picnic tables. It had the benches. That was the table. Then I think there was a bed there already. And the rugs were just little throw rugs. Everything was very cheap. I had a bedspread, very colorful. Something like an Indian bedspread, not exactly like one. I was very much into housekeeping.

Ken: Did Revels and his wife watch over you in any way?

Pow: Well, originally I was with them, and then this place became available and I moved in there. When I was with them we were all working. We all shared household duties. One week one person would do the shopping and another person would do the dishes, and another person would do the housework. We had a chart on the kitchen wall with everybody's name and e verybody's duties for what weeks, and all that. Then after I moved into this place occasionally we would have dinner together or something like that. But we were always very close. We were very good friends really.

Ken: How did you make new friends there?

Pow: Just through the job, really. I met all kinds of people, but they would usually be in the CIO. Also I had a great uncle there. He was quite elderly

Pow: and I used to visit him and his wife, and his daughter who was either a widow or a divorcee. I don't remember. She had a young son. And they would have me over for events like Thanksgiving. They were very, very, very nice to me.

Ken: Were they involved in the union movement in any way?

Powe: Oh, No, no. Not at all. Then Gus Hawkins*I knew. His wife and I were very good friends. He was the first Black State Legislator in California. And at that time, in addition to being an Assemblyman, he was also a functionary of the CIO. I forget what his capacity was, but it was probably a political capacity. But his wife and I were very good friends. And that was really about the extent of it, I guess.

Ken: Did he have much influence on you, or did you discuss things with him?

Pow: Usually on a union level. It was usually a social thing, but we felt the same way about many things.

Ken: OK. That's just what I wanted to know. Let's have some general questions about the war years. Did you ever consider joining the armed forces?

Pow: No.

Ken: Did you ever think of participating in any way in specific war activities?

Powell: When the war first started I was interested in becoming an ambulance driver, and I had gone to the Red Cross which had a program for that, but it was geared to women who did not work. Everything was done in the daytime. After the war started the American Volunteer Society offered a course in automobile mechanics at the Les Vogel Chevrolet Plant and I took that course and enjoyed it. But after that I seemed to have lost my desire to get into the war action.

Ken: Did any of your close friends or relatives belong to the armed forces?

Powell: I had many friends who were in the armed forces.

* Augustus Hawkins

Powell: Usually the army.

Ken: Did you correspond with them?

Powell: With some. And this would go on for a while, and then it would end.

Ken: What did you write about?

Powell: We would write about the situation on the home front. They were very conscious about the home front as opposed to the war front and what we were doing to support the troops. This kind of thing. Personal things.

Ken: I read somewhere about discrimination, particularly in the South. Did any of your friends ever get involved in that?

Powell: I don't recall. I did hear some hair raising stories from the Asian front where there were just bitter complaints by some of my friends of the terrible discrimination by the American forces against the Black forces. I don't remember all the details. They were terribly opposed to the Red Cross and their separate treatment of Blacks. I forget whether one of the countries was India or not, but it was in Asia where the Red Cross had these entertainment houses or hostess houses for the G.I.s and the discrimination was rank. But I forget the little details which embroidered these stories.

Ken: How did the no-strike pledge affect your general problems of organization?

Powell: Los Angeles was a peculiar area at that time, as opposed to San Francisco. San Francisco at that time was considered a union town, and Los Angeles wasn't. There were these huge aircraft plants located in the Southern California area, and there were huge organizing campaigns by the United Automobile Workers to organize them. And they were organized successfully. We would help out on some of these campaigns, particularly as election time approached*. In my own situation, in the Warehouse Local 26, the organizing was on a much, much smaller scale. And the no strike thing itself

- - - - - - -

*National Labor Relations Board elections

Powell: really did not affect us. I think most people really wanted to work. What did happen from time to time unfortunately was in some of these very small houses. Just as we had almost everyone signed up because they wanted to join a union because they knew they would get more money and better working conditions the employer would just pull up stakes and move out of California altogether. This happened a few times.

Ken: The Government didn't do anything about it?

Powell: No, not in those instances. And there was no contract so it was perfectly legal.

Ken: When you did get a place organized, how did you get better conditions when you couldn't use the threat of a strike?

Powell: I don't recall really. The employers, of course, were really interested in production. Everyone was interested in production. We did succeed. I guess occasionaly there would be slow downs or maneuvers of that kind.

Ken: Do you think the employers took advantage of the war situation to underpay and overwork?

Powell: For instance, people were frozen to their jobs. And there was no way they could leave a job and get, say, unemployment compensation or anything else. They just would be out. There were all kinds of committees set up on a federal basis and on local outlets like the War Labor Board. And if a worker had a just grievance about leaving a job the only way he could leave legally was to appear before one of these committees and state his case. And sometimes the committee would rule for him and sometimes against him. Really as I look back, at least on the Local 26 level, other than a very small group pulling up stakes and leaving, it depended on whether the workers in the plant wanted a union or not. Many of them didn't. Many of our failures were due to the fact that the workers on the job did not want a union. And it might be that they were afraid of what might happen.

Powell: Employer intimidation and that kind of thing. But those were our failures where the employees did not want a union. Mainly these would be women employees also.

Ken: Was it that the war suspended a conflict between labor and management?

Powell: No. There was a certain degree of cooperation.

Ken: I was just wondering if, during that period, things got along better between employers and employees.

Powell: To a degree, yes. The unions might have sacrificed to a degree because they really were all out for the war effort. This was the big goal, so that they probably did make sacrifices of normal union goals.

Ken: That's why I was wondering what you could offer these people.

Powell: Usually what you would do - say you were in the drug industry - whatever the standard contract was at that time for wages and conditions, normally that employer would agree to that.

Ken: Was it usually better than what they already had?

Powell: Yes.

Ken. If there were on the job problems, how did they get handled?

Powell: Oh, there was a regular grievance committee set up with a steward on the job, and a stewardess. And it went through the regular mechanics. That wasn't interfered with. All through the war the grievance committee carried on normally.

Ken: There is another general question. Were there any times when it would be easier or harder to organize because you were a woman?

Powell: Personally I felt so. Some of the little houses that would have three shifts on a twenty-four day, it would mean I would have to meet them. I would have to meet the three shifts. I really hated whatever it was - the midnight or the 2 a.m. - because it really interfered with my sleep. And that became really difficult. And I didn't think a man would find it as difficult, who would have the support

Powell: at home. The wife would be doing everyting. So that part of the job I found very hard. Also just driving, driving, driving. Los Angeles was so huge. And you would have one plant twenty-five miles from another plant. But other than that, no.

Kendall: Did you mainly organize women, or did you organize women and men?

Powell: Mainly women, although there were some plants with men and women.

Ken: What did you think about the no strike pledge yourself?

Powell: Well, I was very much in favor of the philosophy that the people on the home front should make the greatest effort to help the people on the war front. I was in agreement with that. I don't remember all the specifics, but at that time I was in agreement with it.

Ken: Were you also in agreement with the codes that froze women's wages?

Powell: I never liked the whole set up of the freezing of people to jobs. I never liked that, and I think that there were many inequities there. People were forced to stay on jobs that they really shouldn't have regardless of the reason. Sometimes people would just like to leave. Sometimes people would have had an opportunity to go to a better job and they couldn't. I was against that whole business of you were frozen to your job.

On the freezing of wages, some employers had a way of getting around that, some kind of a bonus set up, a profit sharing set up which would alleviate some of the workers' gripes that they couldn't get more money. I know I wasn't involved in any contract that would have that in. I don't even know if it was through a contract procedure. It was a way that was legal for the employer to do this because the law was also for the employer, that the employer could not raise salaries. And this was a legal maneuver.

Ken: I was just wondering because there were so many different ways of getting people to join unions - what were

Kendall: your techniques?

Powell: Fairly traditional. The leafleteering, personal conversations, talking to people as they are going to work, coming from work, giving them literature, brochures on the advantages of being a union member. In this Aero Reclamation plant there were so many employees (300, 400, I forget the number) we would have other kinds of things such as teas, Sunday afternoon teas; people like Louise Beavers would be a guest speaker.

Ken: And who was Louise Beavers?

Powell: She was a Hollywood actress, a Black Hollywood actress. And sometimes I would have some of them over to my place which had a very nice patio and we would have enchiladas and this kind of thing. All of the organization there went on in this way. A lot of the organization there went on in that way, fairly large affairs. And we would get others involved. That was the only kind of thing that was a little different from the traditional organizing.

Ken: Where did these women come from?

Powell: Oh, they all practically had come from the deep South.

Ken: What kind of jobs did they come from?

Powell: Housework, mainly. All unskilled.

Ken: Did they have any special problems of adjustment to working in industry?

Powell: Not at this place. They really got along very well.

Ken: I wanted to ask you - did you recome a mbmer of Local 26?

Powell: No.

Ken: Hcw did you participate in the life of the union - or did you?

Powell: Yes, I did. But my capacity was always as an organizer. But I would always be at every union meeting. Always would give a report on the situation of organizing, and knew many, many of the members on a personal basis., and functioned in that manner.

Powell: I don't know if I could have become a member of Local 26 legitimately. I am not sure of that. Aero was the only plant there that I worked in.

Ken: Did you have any special problems as an organizer?

Powell: I don't think so.

Ken: Did you just pick up your organizing skills by yourself, or who did you learn them from?

Powell: Well, the officers of the union were very helpful.

Ken: In what way?

Powell: Frequently, for instance, on the distribution of leaflets they would join me. This kind of thing. And all the secretarial staff was very helpful. I mean I would just ask them for what I wanted and they would give it to me right away. They were extremely helpful and cooperative. If I would write a leaflet it would immediately be mimeographed, and be ready for distribution - never a concern in that way.

Ken: How did you learn how to write leaflets?

Powell: They probably weren't the best, but I would just try to gear them to whatever the specific circumstances of a specific house or group were.

Ken: How did you find out the needs of the people in these houses?

Powell: By talking to them, and really by learning from them. They would tell me.

Ken: So they would tell you and you would figure out a way the union could better their conditions and put it in a leaflet. Is that how you did it?

Powell: Yes.

Ken: Were most women working just because of the war?

Powell: Well most of them were working to earn a living really. There might have been more opportunities for them because of the war. But I think most of them, in my memory, needed the money, just to live.

Ken: These women that came from the deep South, did they come with their families? Were most of them single?

Powell: Some were and some weren't. Some had husbands, children. Many of them were alone though. There were many young women, and many older women who were alone.

Ken: I was just wondering about that, how a woman who had lived in a small community all her life would react to coming out here to a big, sprawling area and adjust. That's why I asked you about their problems of adjustment. I think I would be frightened to do it.

Powell: Yes.

Ken: Did you know any of them intimately?

Powell: Not intimately. I knew them well, but I would say not intimately.

Ken: How did they find places to live?

Powell: Most of them lived in the Black ghetto, and many of them just would have a room in a home. That was fairly common. Some of them would have little cottages. Certainly none of this was luxury living though.

Ken: By they way, there was an awful lot of publicity about you in the papers. You were the youngest organizer, doing well, becoming the most popular woman in CIO circles. Revels made several remarks about you in the Dispatcher.

Powell: Well, I just thought it was a lot of P.R.*(public relations). It really was meaningless. It was just this business which I think you find in the press all the time. It was touting, touting, touting.

Ken: Did they really develop people. I know they gave lip service to the developing of women. Bridges wrote a pamphlet about it. There were articles about training women to take over. How did this affect you?

Powell: Only to the degree that I was appointed an organizer, period. There wasn't any of this tremendous developmental work going on at all. The people in Local 26 were extremeley helpful. But nothing on an international level. The International at that

Powell: time did appoint many women as organizers across the country. But that was as far as it went. There was no effort really to have women developed on a local union scale and have women elected as officials of local unions. And really in a union situation youhave no power unless you are an elected official. And that's where I think things should have been done to help women.

Ken: That's whe e the lip service came in I guess.

Powell: Right, right.

Ken: Did you meet any other women organizers?

Powell: Oh, yes. All kinds in Los Angeles.

Ken: Tell me a little bit about it. Who you met, what you did.

Powell: Well, there was Luisa Moreno, organizer for the United Furniture Workers. I knew her rather well. I forget what heppened to her. The Government wanted to deport her. And whether she left voluntarily or not. She left voluntarily, I guess. I never heard from her again. Loretta Starvus was an organizer for the United Electrical Workers. Helen Warren was a secretary of a local, Local 26. Oh, there were so many women I can't recall. But there were many women organizers in all the unions.. Roberta Montgomery was an organizer. There were many women organizers in those days.

second side of tape

Powell: On the ILWU level I did know Roberta Jones, Florence Atkinson. They were in other sections of the country organizing for ILWU.

Ken: Did you have any life with these women? What did you discuss with them?

Powell: Shop talk, organizing jobs, this kind of thing. There was no such thing as a women's caucus or anything like that, but we were all oriented the same way.

Ken: You mentioned the CIO building when you first came to town - a big CIO building, and all those marvelous people-

Powell: That's where everybody's office was located, and that's where I met everybody.

Ken: Did you have an office there?

Powell: My office would be the Local 26 office.

Ken: What kind of life went on around that building?

Powell: Meetings of different unions, and many's the time you would have workers come there for an organizational meeting. Membership meetings of many of the unions were held there. Then the CIO Council meetings would be held there. So there was quite a daily life there. The bulk of that daily life was the CIO itself, the Congress of Industrial Organization. That was the big office, the main office. Then the other offices were smaller, but they all had regular staff, clerical help for the collectionof dues, posting of dues, the little normal duties of running an office.

Ken: All these organizers from different unions - did you ever get together? Did they have pep talks for you? How did you function?

Powell: Whoever was the head organizers or the one who was overseeing everything would give us the background. For instance at one of these aircraft plants there would be thousands, and the physical set up of the gates, and how many should be here, and how many should be there. That was about it.

Ken: Did you have any life with these women organizers? I mean did you go out together at all?

Powell: We might, not as such at all. But there might be a party that somebody was giving and we might get together there - somethigg like that. But we never got together on a personal basis. I think each one had her private life, and we would meet socially. And usually it would be at a social party.

Ken: How happen you got the community involved so much in this organizing? How did you do it?

Ken: Louise Beavers coming to meetings, and other people in the community. How did you involve them?

Powell: Initially with a telephone call. And I would explain the whole situation to them; that these women were from the deep South; that they weren't being paid what they should be paid for the work they were doing; that we needed community help, in getting them involved and in getting them to start thinking about the possibilities of joining a union. And someone like Louise Beavers, whom I never had met, except for that telephone call out of the cold, was extremely receptive. And they enjoyed the tea meeting that we had with her. She was just as nice as she could be too. Some others were too busy to be able to accept because they had to give up a certain amount of time also without any pay or amything of that nature.

Ken: What made you think about getting other people outside of union people involved in this?

Powell: Oh probably discussions I would have with different people, with Revels and Gus, talking about ways in which we could reach these women.

Ken: I see. You were involved in political action to some extent, weren't you?

Powell: Yes.

Ken: How?

Powell: Let's see. There was a political action committee. That would have been the 1944 election I think. And I don't remember all the details. I know that Henry Wallace came to town to get support for Roosevelt. There were several union meetings with him, and community meetings with him. Somebody's name I cant remember - he was running for Congressman, and in the middle of the campaign it turned out that he had been a member of the Klu Klux Klan, but that he had changed for the better as Justice Black had done. And we were supporting him. His name might have been Styles. He did a fabulous job in the primary, but in the

Powell: final election he lost. And I was spending the bulk of my time on his election at that time, as I recall.

Ken: How did you spend your time?

Powell: Well, a lot of it was house to house work. I also was involved with the Democratic Party at that time. I guess the organizational set up was that certain people from each area would meet with the Democratic Party as a council for reports of what was going on. Then there was some work in the churches, the Black churches, that we would do to reach peoole. And that's about as much as I recall.

Ken: Did you have any sort of a campaign to get people to register to vote?

Powell: Oh, yes. We had a tremendous registration drive because again so many of the Blacks in Los Angeles at that time had come directly there from the Deep South, and they had come from areas where there were poll taxes. So they had never been able to vote because they never had the money to pay the poll tax. So there had to be quite an educational program to point out to them that in California you did not have to pay a poll tax in order to vote. So that was done - lots of signs on telephone posts advising people that in California you do not have to pay a poll tax in order to vote. After that then was the drive to get people to register to vote. Many of these people could not write very well and this would become a problem because they had to sign. From us the petitions would go to the City Hall. The registration sheets would go to the City Hall. Sometimes a signature would be challenged, only because it wasn't legible. There was no thought of dishonesty or anything like that. But that was quite a campaign and thousands of people were registered to vote.

Ken: How did you do your door to door work?

Powell: Specifically I don't remember. It would just be ringing a doorbell.

Ken: Did you do a lot of it.

Powell: Oh, yes. Right. Lots of it. Most people were very receptive. Then we had many contacts of course through

Powell: the different unions, through the CIO. Many, many contacts.

Ken: Were you part of the Democratic Party in any way?

Powell: Not per se. I was a registered Democratic. I wasn't a paid official of the Democratic Party. After I left the organizing job I worked for the CIO Political Action Committee, and as part of the -

Ken: Wait a minute. Why did you leave the organizing job?

Powell: It was an involved story.

Ken: We have the time.

Powell:= I was personally against an officer of Local 26 who was, in my judgement, trying to railroad through a tremendous salary increase. And many of the Local 26 members whom I knew were against this also, and had talked to me about it. And I told them what I honestly felt. It wasn't right for a local union official to earn so much money in a year. So there was a membership meeting at which the membership voted the salary increase down. And I guess there was communication with the International Office in San Francisco that I was interfering in a Local situation. So anyway I was dismissed.

Ken: How did you feel about that?

Powell: I didn't care. Because if I wanted the job it wo ld have been very simple to keep. All I would have had to do was go to Harry Bridges and I could have had the job. But by that time I was glad to get out.

Ken: Did you feel you had interfered with the Local?

Powell: Oh, I knew I had. No question. And I thought my point was correct. On a technical basis it was wrong, of course. I shouldn't have talked to Local 26 members, and possibly be an influence on them. But I really didn't want to be involved if an International was going to accept that kind of position that -- I am not for labor union officials getting lds and lots of money. I am very opposed to that. And I think that's been one of the most corrupting influences in the entire American lavor movement - labor officials

Powell: getting $80,000 a year, $100,000 a year, cadillacs, I think they have been corrupted by money. And then they never go back to the job from which they emerged. And they really forget their past. And I just always have been against union officials earning so much more than the people for whom they have been elected to work and help. So I was disillusioned and didn't want any part of it.

Ken: How did you get fired?

Powell: I don't know. There was a meeting or something where it was discussed, verbally.

Ken: What did your friend Revels think about it?

Powell: He was quite angry at the International.

Ken: On your job for the International, were you treated any differently because you were so young?

Powell: Not that I recall. Not too much. The Local 26 people, I think I have to give them all credit. There were about four men, business agents, and they were just very, very helpful in every way. I was no threat to anybody because I was an appointed official and had no base in the union. I couldn't ever have been an official because I wasn't even a member of the local. I think that would be involved too, that they knew they had nothing to fear from me. And I took a lot of the load off their shoulders and was a good source for more members to come into the union, which would enhance their jobs.

Ken: Outside of Aero Space, tell me a little bit about the other plants that you organized, or tried to organize.

Powell: There were bag companies. The workers there were mainly Mexican-Americans. They were pretty miserable jobs - dirty, hard, unskilled. We were fairly successful with some of those.

Ken: How did you organize Mexican-Americans. Did you have different techniques for doing that? I am thinking about the fact that you spoke Spanish fluently.

Powell: Yes. My Spanish at that time wasn't as fluent as it could have been. Because in those days they didn't

Powell: teach Spanish that way. I was about to communicate and I did do some speaking in Spanish. There we would get these huge plant meetings on their lunch hour, and have a mike set up. And frequently I would talk to them in Spanish, although it certainly wasn't Spanish to be proud of. But I was able to communicate. And occasionally I would write a column in the union newspaper in Spanish. They were extremely receptive to organizing.

Then there were other plants also. I can't remember all of the industries. There were such tiny, unusual places. I don't remember the nature of the work even except that everything was unskilled. Almost everything was unskilled.

Ken: In these bag companys, were there many women working?

Powell: Yes. Some men, but the bulk of the employees would be women, sewing the bags.

Ken: Did you get a chance to meet amy of these women personally or go to their homes?

Powell:= No. It was done all on a plant basis.

Ken: Getting back to Aero Space, why was i that this was such a key and focal thing?

Powell: Because there were so many employees there. I don't remember the number, 300, 400, 500. Just a tremendous number of women workers there. That would be one of the main reasons it was a key plant to organize. Some of these other places would have 12 workers. It is just all the difference in the world. The time and effort that you spend. At one place where the employer pulled out, I think that maybe there were about 50 people there altogether, but the ones that had three shifts that I had to get up and meet, compared with my time and effort, and then the employer pulling out, and this Aero Reclamation, and that number of employees, there is.

Ken: I see. I just couldn't get it into my head why this was so important

Just one more thing about Local 26 in Los Angeles, did you participate in any way in their fight for adequate housing?

Powell: No. Housing was a general problem for all of Los Angeles at that time. The housing situation wasso tight it was almost total occupancy, and it was very difficult for anybody coming to Los Angeles to locate. Usually they had to room in with somebody. And then also the question of finding one's own apartment, there were no vacant apartment so you almost had to know somebody you knew to be leaving in order to get an apartment. That's what most people did. They moved in with somebody and everybody would be listening when such and such an apartment or a house would become vacant, and try to get it first. But housing was very tight.

Ken: Somebody, I have forgotten who,said there wasn't enough of a fight for proper housing for minority people in Los Angeles because the union figured the war effort was more important. They didn't fight hard enough.

Powell: I certainly don't recall any discussions on housing, which would implement that point of view. I mean I don't recall any big union discussions about "let's do something about housing." I remember discussions about "Let's get bundles ready for Britain".

There was a grea deal of talk I must say about this book, "Why Women Cry", or "Wenches with Wrenches" written by Elizabeth Hawes, I think, and tremendous discussion on that. I will say that. There was all kinds of discussion about the post war period, and that's where you got into housing. Nothing on the war time basis, but what we were going to do after the war.

Ken: What who was going to do?

Powell: The Unions - on securing adequate housing. How all the homes were going to be built in such a way that there was going to be no housework necessary practically for working women who would want to stay on the job.

Ken: How interesting. Who had these discussions?

Powell: A great many union people. This book wasvery popular,

Powell: and of course many of the people who had these discussions were the women organizers particuarly. I recall many of those discussions with them. They even used the term "blueprint for tomorrow." They really envisioned this whole thing, saw it in their mind.

Ken: You say "they" - what about you?

Powell: It all sounded great. There were things I didn't like. For instance, one of the plans was (and I am talking about the Elizabeth Hawes book) that was sort of the blueprint) was that working mothers, working wives, working women, instead of going home every night after work and fixing dinner over a hot stove, would have community places, and everybody would go to a community place for dinner. I never found that appealing! I would rather go home and cook over the stove. But there were many, many discussions on that.

Ken: By the way, were there any unauthorized str ked while you were down there?

Powell: Not that I recall. There may have been. I don't recall any.

Ken: There is one question which isn't too relevent. And I was just curious, and I couldn't find it anyplace in my reading - this A. Philip Randolph march on Washington - was there any readtion on the West Coast to that?

Powell: A. Philip Randolph was certainly a well-known person on the West Coast, particularly among the Blacks. And contro versial, pros and cons about him, but certainly given due credit for his organizational work on the railways. On the specific march to Washington, I don't recall any reaction. I remember the event, but I don't remember the reaction.

Ken: I just wondered whether anyone from the West Coast had planned to get involved in it.

Powell: Not to my knowledge.

Ken: What were the pros and cons on this. It would seem to me he was revered.

Powell: He did a fantastic organizational job on the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Part of the cons I think was that, with so many of these people, they have a sense of power and they are affected by their position of power - a personality thing.

TaPe 7 - 1/15/77

Kendall: In Los Angeles, do you remember the Zellerbach Paper Company winning equal pay for equal work for women?

Powell: No.What was the nature of that event, and what was the year?

Kendall: It was on the 7th of December, 1943.

Powell: I was there, but I don't remember that, but my recall was in San Francisco. Of course this is a little different. This would be that the women were permitted to do the men's jobs, and they received the pay that the men received. But this decision - I don't have any recall on that at all. I don't even remember it.

Kendall: Let's get back toLos Angeles. You were not unhappy about losing your job, but how did you get your new job?

Powell: Jobs just came from everywhere really. I was beseiged with offers to be an organizer for other unions. It must have been someone in the CIO office who asked if I would work for the CIO Political Action Committee.. And that interested me a great deal, so that's what I did. Also there would be a time limit on it. It would end at election time. So that appealed to me also - that there would be an end and I could make other decisions as to what I wanted to do.

Ken: So what did you do with the CIO Political Action Committee.

Powell: Well really the same work I had been doing, but on a full time basis, day in day out, on organizing mamy many people to become registrars of voters - lining up

Powell: people to do doorbell ringing, and this kind of thing. Going to meetings. But I enjoyed the work very much.

Kendall: Were you in charge of an area?

Powell: Usually I worked in the area near the CIO building which was the Black ghetto, Central Avenue. I did branch out into other areas. We covered a tremendous amount of territory.

Ken: Were other women involved?

Powell: There were. I don't remember who. But yes, there were men and women.

Ken: Did you have meetings in the neighborhoods?

Powell: No! We didn't have these little political meetings. Occasionally we might get a group of union workers together to discuss getting their members registered to vote, but nothing on a neighborhood basis as such for meetings.

Ken: How long did you work for the CIO, then?

Powell: Not very long. It would have been a matter of months. Maybe six months.

Ken: And then what happened?

Powell: Well the election was over. The election came and went. And I received a letter from my aunt that my mother had had a heart attack, and that I should come home. So I came back and decided that I would stay. I didn't come back to stay, but I just came back for a trip and to see my mother. But then I decided this was a good time to come back and leave Southern California which was never one of my favorite spots. I never really liked living in that area; and that wasbefore there was any smog whatsoever. I have never been back to LA since. So I don't know anything about the smog except what I have heard - that it is absolutely terrible. But there was no smog in Los Angeles in those days. And the only thing I enjoyed about living there was outdoor living, having breakfast outdoors, dinner outdoors. I loved that. But this getting around and travelling, all of that. I did not like that City.

Ken: Did you continue living at home when you came back?

Powell: Yes.

Ken: Your father had passed away by then.

Powell: Oh yes.

Ken: How did you arrange your life then?

Powell: I went back to Local 6 and got a job there at Coffin-Redington. And then after Coffin-Redington -

Ken: Tell me a little bit about Coffin-Redington.

Powell: It was a drug warehouse, I think. And I was a packer.

Ken: Was that a man's or a women's job?

Powell: It was a man's job. After Pearl Harbor, once the union permitted women to go on men's jobs, I never took a woman's job again.

Ken: Let me ask a question. Were jobs still considered men's and women's jobs?

Powell: Oh yes. That was the terminology. Some women were on mens jobs.

Ken: Did the women ever think that this was a temporary thing?

Powell: It was certainly in the back of their minds. They did not accept this as a one hundred percent effort by the union that it was sincere at all. Many of them thought it was just to help the union out for the duration because there were no men. The employers needed employees. All of them were involved in the armed forces. So that was always a thought in many women's minds that it was a wartime situation and that it would end. To a degree I think it came to pass when the war ended. Not only in Local 6, but on the Municipal Railways. Many jobs that women took in San Francisco during the war just disappeared for women.

Ken: Well, how did you like working at Coffin-Redington?

Powell: It was a fun sort of a place. Many of the members who worked there were very active in Local 6 so there was tremendous shop talk going on all the time. Everyone was also interested in the war effort and it was a very plesant place to work - an excellent

Powell: grievance committee. Anything that came up would be settled favorably for the workers. I enjoyed working there.

Ken: Why did you leave?

Powell: I was only there temporarily, Where there would be a rush order on something they would have to hire more employees. I was probably there about three months and then the work ran out on the purpose for which I had been hired. Then I went back to the union hall. And I think the next job I got was at Mangrum Holbrook and Elkus which was a hotel supply house.

Ken: What did you do there?

Powell: I started in as a packer. Eventually I became a receiving clerk.

Ken: Did you ever become an official steward there?

Powell: Oh, yes. I was a steward there. First I was a packer, then an order filler, and then a receiving clerk. And in the course of time I was elected a steward at that plant.

Ken: Tell me a little about your activities as a steward.

Powell: Well, they were varied. You have many problems on the job. As a steward, one of the main functions in those days was to take up grievances. I was considered a small house. I would say under a dozen employees. It was a huge place, but as far as the warehouse was concerned it was a small plant. It had a huge office force. And you would get all kinds of little complaints from the workers. There was an older warehouse worker there who was a packer about 86 years of age - a fantastic man. And all of a sudden, without a conference with anybody, management decided not to open the front doors (which was the way people gained admission) until a certain hour in the morning. Well this man commuted from Oakland, and it meant he had to stand out in the cold for let us say a half an hour at least. So that would be a legitimate grievance. So I would go see the employer. And you would use any trick of the trade you could use. So I would just bring in the man's age, and

Powell: that he commuted. This kind of thing. And we settled that they would go back to the time that they had originally opened the door. That would be that. Then you would have problems with some employees who would drink their lunch on the job. And there were ways (we never really succeeded in this, neither did Local 6). I really think the union should do something o the question of chronic alcoholism for the State permits disability to be used for getting help on chronic alcoholism. We never did anything on that question. Maybe they do now, but they certainly didn't then. And I thought that the thrust should have come on the union's part to help these members who had problems of alcholism. But it didn't, and as a steward, really, one's role (including mine) was to try to protect these men's jobs, which we would do. And one of the ways we did it was by doing their work for them when they were unable to do it having drunk too much on a lunch hour. But there would be other beefs. The union, for instance, would want more pay per hour. This wouldn't be done on a contract basis. This was a special instance. And in this house I didn't win that one. What they did, they proposed letting us work four hours longer or something. And the men on that job just ate that proposal up, so I was outvoted. There was nothing I could do about it except accept it. But anyway those were some of the things I did. Frequently stewards would collect dues. If a member wanted to pay his dues to a steward he could. He would receive a receipt,and sometimes he considered it much easier to give the money to the steward than to go down to the union hall and pay his dues. But that was the nature of the job.

Ken: Was there much problem of absenteeism with women who had children?

Powell: Not that I recall at all.

Ken: Did the women have any particular problems other than they had on other jobs?

Powell: No. Weight would be a problem - carrying and lifting. There was a State law that no woman could lift over twenty-five pounds. This would become ticklish at times, particularly with some men who were very opposed to women getting the same pay for doing the work they were doing when they couldn't lift a hundred pound carton or something like that. So that was always ticklish. You would always try to avoid it by having a hand truck where you are not really lifting, you are pushing, and the hand truck takes the weight off. That was really the main gripe of many men and that therefore women should not get the same amount of money.

Also I had gone to Woolworth's during that period before I went to Mangrum Holbrook and Elkus. And the men there were really anti-women. And the women's jobs there were mainly orderfillers and packers. And they did give the women a bad time - "There are men without jobs, and you are taking their jobs away." Actually every woman who was working needed a job. She was either a divorcee or a widow with children, a single woman, or people with parents who were their dependents. But they were very unpleasant on this issue. Personally very nice. They knew. You picked it up from them that they would be so glad when the war ended and women would leave. So you knew this wasn't a really sincere union thrust to put women on men's jobs to get the same pay and all that.

Ken: I wonder. On jobs like this, certainly there are certain women who can lift things and certain men who can't lift things. What about men on men's jobs who, say, are ninety pound weaklings? Did this ever happen?

Powell: No, I don't recall its happening. See, there were several kinds of classifications. The job orders that came in most, and it was a job that really women didnot get, and that was the lowest classification.

Powell: That was a freight handler, and that's where there was a lot of handling of heavy weights that puny men would not be able to handle either. And they probably weren't hired by the employer. The contract was a peculiar deal there. He had to call the union hall to get employees and he had to accept them for the day's work, but he didn't have to keep them for the next day's work. So my presumption would be that if a ninety pound man came down for a freight handler's job he would work one day, and would be let go at the end of the day and not be rehired for the next day. There wasn't much mechanization in those days. The only mechanization was. I forget the word they have on the trucks. The back comes up by ma chinery and goes down.

Ken: Lift trucks?

Powell: That's right. That was about it for mechanization.

Ken: By the way. You mentioned there were two women who were leading the union, Aune and Frances. What happened to them? Did they ever help you?

Powell: Oh, they had left by this time.. I think Aune entered the armed forces in some capacity, a WAC or a WAVE. Frances, I don't recall, but neither of them was in the Union at the time.

Ken: Were there other women who had come forward?

Powell: Oh, there were many women who were active in the union.

Ken: Well, you did you start getting active again in the local.

Powell: Certainly by being a steward. Then, by being a steward, you were also a member of the Steward's Committee which met once a month. Union meetings, general membership meetings, were about once a month. Again, after the steward's meeting you would hold a house meeting and report on that. frequently at the same time you would report on the general membership meeting, if some hand't gone. I was elected to the Executive Board of the union. At the union meetings I was usually rather

Powell: vocal on motions that were made, and after the discussion period for or against I would usually state my position and my reason for the position on a certain vote at a union meeting. And just through those kinds of channels.

Ken: Was Local 6 unusual in the fact that it had so much going for it, stewards committee, drill teams, dances, parades, was this unusual or did other unions do the same thing?

Powell: I think it was unusual. Local 6 at that time I always thought was tremendous, really in these extra curricular activities. They were very meaningful to the employees because in the war years there really was nothing to do, with the blackouts and everything being closed, this was a very enriching part of one's life, particularly the sports programs. We had fine sports programs - basketball, vollyball, baseball, bowling, and then all kinds of competition around the city. And of course this was good exercize; it was a nice social event.

At many of the union meetings those days there would be a little union skitpresented.

Ken: A drama group too!

Powell: Yes. Mara Alexander was the leader of this group, but they would all be local six members who would be the actors and actresses. And it was usually an educational union skit, funny and at the same time a point for unionism, trade unionism, would be made. And I think the Local 6 situation was unique there. I think it is too bad that they eliminated all those things over the years.

Ken: How did you become director of women's sports?

Powell: Never. It must have been a euphemism. I was very involved in some of the sports activities. I was involved in the basketball, vollyball, baseball and bowling. I guess I was involved in four sports there in that union where I played and enjoyed it and had a certain knowledge of

Powell: all those games.

Ken: Were these co-educational, men and women in both of them?

Powell: No. The only was that was co-ed was the bowling team. The rest were all women's games, and probably that was due to the sport itself. For instance women's basketball in those days was totally different from men's basketball. Women played in a court divided into three sections where men played in a court divided in two sections. I imagine it was supposedly the question of physical capacity that a woman couldn't run as much, as long, as hard as a man, and this kind of thing. And we women resented it, but there was nothing one could do. They were the official rules and everything was very official with the referees and all that, and even in the way the courts were painted. These lines would be painted for basketball.

Ken: You said it was a euphemism. Weren't you the director of women's sports?

Powell: I don't remember any such title. I know I had responsibility, for instance, for seeing such things about where are all the baseball bats, where are all the baseballs, where are all the baseball mitts, that kind of thing. I don't remember the title at all, and certainly there wouldn't have been much responsibility other than keeping track of some of the physical assets.

For every team you were going to be on everyone had to have a physical examination, and I was involved in calling some doctors to see if they could give us a special deal, costwise.

Ken: Why did you have to have a physical examination?

Powell: Just to assure the union officialdom that we were in good physical health. Probably lawsuits. This is very common on a school level too. No student can play in any sport unless there is a physical examination. If you had a weak heart and didn't know it and were in a strenuous basketball game

Powell: You could drop dead.

Ken: How did this sports thing start?

Powell: I don't remember the origin. When I got in it was going. I don't know about the origin, but the activity that went on in sports was due to World War II. These sports definitely fulfilled a need for recreation for young people at no cost.

Ken: How many women were involved?

Powell: I don't remember, but there was no difficulty on getting members on any team whatsoever.

Ken: And you were on four teams?

Powell: I was in four sports. The basketball is the only one I recall being involved in league play. I was in vollyball and baseball. I don't particularly recall playing other teams. I think it was more Local 6 teams that were playing, not other unions.

Ken: Where did your friends come from- the people in the teams?

Powell: The houses I worked in. They came from all areas of Local 6. I was involved in committees, sports activities, places where I worked, this kind of thing.

Ken: Can you tell me anything more about the sports activities?

Powell: Not much more than what I said really. They were a very, very big thnng; fulfilled a tremendous need. There were many, many young people in the union at that time, and it was just a great recreational activity, and again social at the same time. It was almost threefold, although we might not have looked upon it as such in those days. But recreational, physical for good health, and social for friends and social activities

Ken: Who paid for the uniforms.

Powell: The union must have because I don't recall paying for anything. I don't even recall uniforms. I don't think we did have uniforms. But there was no

Powell: expense from the union members point of view. Everything was paid for by the union. I don't remember any uniforms. There were no uniforms.

Ken: The drill team had uniforms.

Powell: Yes. I knew many members of it, and they just loved that drill team. Those who were on it liked that kind of thing - lots of travelling away from San Francisco, and again it was a social-recreational experience for them. And they just loved that. There was the drum and drill corps, all the works.

Ken: It must have been a fantastic period.

Powell: It was.

Side two tape seven

Ken: There was also a tremendous amount of war work being done in the local, wasn't there? How were you involved?

Powell: You mean in the war effort?

Ken: Yes. Blood bank, war bonds, all these things.

Powell: I don't think I was too terribly involved except for the war bonds and the blood bank. We would have these times when everybody would be set up to go down to the blood bank and give blood. On the bonds, almost everybody had payroll deductions for bonds. I forget all the details. I know that we made purple heart awards for people who were making contributions to the war effort.

We were very active in things more of a political nature like maintaining rent control. Local 6 played a very strong role in that. Everytime there would be a drive to eliminate rent control we would go to the City Hall at certain meetings, and that is the thing I recall most is the political thing to try and maintain rent control which we were able to achieve together with the other groups in San Francisco.

Ken: Did you have any particular program for women? I am thinking of nursery schools, etc.

Powell: Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

Ken: Did anybody try to initiate anything?

Powell: I don't recall anything like that.

Ken: Was there any discussion on the second front, war tactics at all?

Powell: There would be discussion. I don't recall - There was discussion on opening a second front. Now whether there were union resolutions on that, I don't recall. But certainly the war and its outcome was a very common topic of discussion on the job and everywhere, everywhere. And many people in Local 6 thought that a second front should be opened much sooner than it actually was, really.

Ken: About this time the Local instituted a 48 hour week with eight hours of overtime. What did you think of this? You had a 4o hour week before, didn't you?

Powell: Yes. Right. Well, I was very much in favor of the war effort, and I really felt that the people at home who were not involved in possibly getting killed or wounded should do something extra that might upset their normal lives as a contribution to the war effort. And I accepted it - the eight hours overtime, although I found it difficult. I really did. I found it fatiguing to work 48 hours a week. But I approved of that.

Ken: What about other women?

Powell: I think many people approved of it because they wanted more money. I think that is one reason it was acceptable to so many people. But there was a great deal of feeling on this other level also - that we should make some extra effort to contribute to the war. Most people were very much against Hitler and Nazi Germany and thought that this was a just war and that we were fighting a just cause. And the two sides were there, that we should be doing something more to help since we are safe here, and another group, "I certainly can use the extra money, particularly because of the victory tax.. That was at first 3% and kept going up, up and up.

Ken: You were on the Legislative Committee too. What did you do on that?

Powell: The Legislative Committee on Local 6. Unless it were some of the things such as rent control, I don't recall any of the specifics.

Ken: I was thinking about housing again.

Powell: Well on housing again, all I recall is that rent control seemed to be the big Local 6 effort o housing, and it was a very, very important thing to maintain. There was no question about that. Landlords would have just had the rents skyrocket unless we had that law in effect. Always efforts were being made to try to eliminate rent control.

Ken: You continued to live at home?

Powell: Yes.

Ken: Did your sister continue to live at home too?

Powell: She got married, and I guess they lived here for a year before they moved to Oakland.

Ken: Was your mother still quite ill?

Powell: My mother, it was discovered later, had had rheumatic fever as a youngster and apparently didn't realize it. And this is something that then re-appears in heart damage in later life. So she was a permanent patient. But she certainly didn't live an invalid's life. She couldn't work at all. That's one thing that had to be eliminated. Normally a visiting nurse would come once a week and give her some shots which would be involved. She had to keep her wieght down and she would see the doctor about once a week also. But she wasn't bedridden.

Ken: You didn't have to keep house then?. I just wondered if you had to do that in addition to everything else.

Powell: No. no.

Ken: About this time the Equal Rights Amendment was brought up before congress and the unions were against it. Do you remember that.

Powell: No I don't. I don't recall it. What year was that?

Ken: 1943.

Powell: I was still in the Union. I was in Los Angeles then, but I don't recall anything on the Equal Rights.

Ken: By the way, when you were running for Executive Board, how did you campaign?

Powell: I didn't campaign.

Ken: You didn't even make a statement that I could find.

Powell: No. I would just be on the ballot really, and my votes would come from the members who were familiar with my record probably. I was known in the union because one of the things, when you spoke at a union meeting you had to give your name before you stated your position on a vote. And I frequently would speak on a motion. So I was known there. And I was involved in so many activities in the union and committees that I would imagine that's the way the election went. I never campaigned.

Ken: Have you told me all the activities you were involved in?

Powell: As far as I recall.

Ken: When you were on the Executive Board, how did you function?

Powell: I functioned as an independent really. I was always thinking of the best interests of the union, the members of the union. That's what I mean. And many of the things that would come up would be rather cut and dried. And I would figure out the vote. Something very controversial where I knew I wouldn't have a chance on the executive committee to have it voted the way I thought it should be, then I would not vote, but I would bring it up at a membership meeting.

Ken: Sneaky. Do you remember any particular instance?

Powell: One I remember a proposal, Let's see now - to become a full time member of Local 6 one had to work in one plant for one year. And there was a proposal to be able to become a full member in three months, and I was in favor of that where the leadership wasn't. I was in favor of it because there were so many new people coming into that union, particularly black, and I just thought it was terrible to have to work one year in one house and never know if you were going to be permitted to actually become a full time

Powell: union member, and that three months would be a much fairer way. So many of those jobs were totally unskilled. And I think three months gives an employer a good idea of a worker's work habits. Does he produce? Does he get to work on time? Does he stay sober all day? This kind of thing. So that is one that I recall. And the membership voted for the three months.

Ken: When you said you were an independent, were there two groups?

Powell:= No, not at all. That's the kind of thing I meant - this proposal. That I would not always go along with what the elected officials thought was the best thing. if I thought something was better I would disagree. That's what I meant by being independent.

Ken: Were there other women on the board?

Powell: Oh yes. There was no discrimination.

Ken: The board had 17 members, I believe. Do you remember what the proportion was.

Powell: No, except I know there were women memgers - that you looked at it as a men and women's group.

Ken: Do you remember any specific instances when women's problems were brought up at the executive board?

Powell: I don't recall. I do rememberone of the first strikes I had been involved in which was a short three day strike. I mentioned that before where the women were sold down the fiver on the wage increase. That would come up frequently about women and using women as a way of settling a strike. It usually would be where the employer would say we would be willing to do this, and it always would mean less for the women than the men were getting. That seemed to be historical. And the only break the women really got was the outbreak of World War II when they were then permitted to go on so-called men's jobs at the pay men had been receiving. This was coincidental. It really wasn't any leadership that did this.

Ken: Speaking of this, it wasn't until 1944 that a women's dispatch system was set up. How were women dispatched before 1944?

Powell: Before 1944 you would just go up to the office and say you were out of work and needed a job and they would either send you out on one or not. After '44, then they had a regular plug board system.

Ken: The men always had a plug board system?

Powell: Yes. Right.

Ken: Was this a fair arrangement?

Powell: Who knows You never had any knowledge of what really was going on behind the scenes. There was no way that you know how many people were ahead of you, behind you, or what jobs were available.

Ken: Did a union official do the dispatching?

Powell: No, I don't recall union officials doing that.

Ken: Who did it then?

Powell: Clerical workers, I think.

Ken: Well, how did this get changed?

Powell: I don't remember the background on that.

Ken: What was the new system, then?

Powell: A plug board system where you would be given a plug. And it was in full vision. It was in front of everybody on a wall.

Ken: Was it still separate though?

Powell: Oh yes. It was separate as I recall. I don't ever remember going down where there were men plugged in also. It might have been though. I might just be rusty on my memory.

Ken: In other words, the women were still separate.

Powell: As I recall. yes.

Ken: Did you have a spearate women's dispatcher then?

Powell: No, there has never been a woman dispatcher there.

Ken: This is something I couldn't quite figure out. There was a strike at Mangrum Holbrook during the war.

Powell: It was all of Local 6.

Ken: During the war?

Powell: No. The war had ended. On VJ Day I was at Woolworths.

Powell: And I went to Mangrum, Holbrook Elkus after Woolworths. So it was a total Local 6 strike and it was after the war.

Ken: Welll get to that after the war. I want to continue on the war then. Here is something, and I'll read it to you: "On December 15, 1944 a 5¢ increase and $60. back pay was won for women" - and this was "considered a step forwardtoward the elimination of arbitrary differential." (from the Dispatcher). I don't really know what this means. How did you work towards complete elimination of the differential?

Powell: Well, I guess just by screaming constantly. It would be the women who would be active in the union, the ones on the executive board, the women stewards at stewards meetings. This kind of thing.

Ken: It was actually the union policy that the differential should be eliminated?

Powell: Oh probably. Of course they had permitted it to become so deeply involved in the contractsthroughout the years. You know, through its history. First of all it started out with the differential, the women's belt jobs had a much lower rate of pay than the men's jobs - the freight handlers, the packers, the order fillers. Then, in different strikes where the women on the belt lines would receive less of a wage increase than the men on the men's jobs, they permitted this differential to increase. Then women really started protesting this differential. And I imagine that their votes were considered important too for the officials in their re-election. This is how it probably became a part of the union goal to eliminate differential.

Ken: Oh, by the way, were you on the Bridges Defense Committee?

Powell: I don't know if I were actually on the committee. I know as a steward I was involved because I remember we sold stamps to get money for the Bridges defense Committee. But I don't remember being on any special committee for Bridges defense.. There

Powell: was just a local Bridges Defense Committee.

Kendall: Did you ever go to the Labor School?

Powell: Oh, yes. I took courses like writing. I never finished anything there. I would go and get started and take a couple of courses of that kind, but - I remember I had a course with Murial Rukeyser. And I enjoyed that kind of thing - just to be involved in those kinds of discussions. But I think that's the only kind of thing I took at the Labor School.

Ken: Well, is there anything else you can think of that I haven't asked you about the war period?

Powell: No. Not really.

Ken: Well, OK. Let's get to the United Nations Conference. You were in San Francisco at that time. Do you remember anything about it?

Powell: I didn't go to any part of it. I was very interested in it as a lay person. Very interested in it and very excited about it. And certainly read everything in the newspapers about it. But I wasn't involved in it at all.

Ken: What was it like during that period?

Powell: You mean the City and that kind of thing. I don't remember the union being involved in that. It might have been. But I don't remember union involvement in the United Nations. It might have been esotaric actually, the invitation list to invitation list to the United Nations. I am sure if there had been a way I could have gone I would have gone. And I know I was thinking of it as a lay person all the time, thinking about it, being excited, and thinking maybe this could be the solution.

Ken: What was your reaction to the dropping of the atom bomb?

Powell: I was opposed to it. I just thought it was terrible - the worst thing of World War II. I didn't think it was nedessary at all. I thought it right then and there and have never

Powell: forgiven Truman for ordering that button pressed. Until that time I was the product of the times that until then said that civilians really should never be involved. And here the ones who lived were maimed for the rest of their lives. I just thought it was terrible.

Ken: I read someplade that someone said that if they had been a white nation the bomb never would have been dropped. What do you think about that?

Powell: Oh, I agree. I think that was very much involved.

There were many German war prisoners brought to the United States during World War II. And certainly they were prisoners and had their work details. But there was never the prejudice against them that there had been against the American citizens who were Japanese, of Japanese ancestry. And I am sure it was color involved. Not necessarily that it was the only criterion. But I think people were more prejudiced against Japanese than they were against Germans.

And some of the things (I don't know if I mentioned that before) American sailors coming back here and saying how in those German homes you could just eat off the floor, they were so clean, and the French were so dirty. And I would just wonder about this/- kind of thinking - so what about those clean kitchens you could eat off of - what about their minds, the things they permitted to happen there.

Ken: I think we'll just stop here, and then go on to the post war period. I remember reading about German prisoners being treated in the South better than Black enlisted men.

Powell: I can believe it. I went to an area around Stockton. I forget whether it was Auburn, but in that area of California, and I went to someplace where there were German prisoners of war. And they were on work details. They were in some kind of prison uniform. But, my land, what a contrast with the fences at Tanforan down here for holding the American Japanese

Powell: getting ready to ship them off to the concentration camps. It looked like freedom, although you did know they were prisoners of war. And certainly no prejudice or anything. But I was shocked.

Ken: There is so much post atom bomb dropping thinking now -

Powell: I think something could have been done on a diplomatic level where the Japanese could have really been made to understand that the bomb existed, and the war could have ended before any bomb was ropped. I don't think it was necessary to win the war.

Ken: We were discussing the matter of the No-Strike policy of the International and wondering if it affected the people on the job fighting for better conditions. What do you think about this?

Powell: I don't think there was a stop in people fighting for conditions on the job on a local basis at all.

Ken: You were saying something about you and Slyvia.

Powell: Oh. We had gone to one of the eating places around there, oneof the eateries. And this was during World War II. And it was a cafeteria type service. First you went to the counter and got the food and then took it to a table. And the girl who was behind the counter wouldn't serve us because of this visibly black girl. So Sylvia created such a scene there that we were served. Then many people went there afterwards without any problem. There were all kinds of little incidents of that kind that were always won. But it was on an individual basis. In the houses it could be done by the steward. Sometimes there would be problems in a house. There was a regular grievance committee set up there. I remember one case. I forget where that was. I think it was Woolworth's. It was a funny one. Where some of the whites were really bothering a black women with profanities and other things of that kind, and she called them sons-of-bitches. So they brought charges against her for calling them that. And the grievance of the local itself (not of the house) settled the case by asking her to apologize to them. So she said, "I apologize for calling you sons-of-bitches." (laughter) I always liked that one. But anyway that did stop the difficulties at work. That was the end of it. You know, on the surface at any rate.

Ken: I see. Well there are some other things. The shipyards did a lot of thingsto get women in like Musak (I understand) and beauty parlors, consultants, and so on. Was there any conflict between the warehouse and

Ken: for women? To get them into the industry?

Powell: I don't know. As far as all these extras. I didn't know about them. I am unfamiliar about the extras. Of course in the warehouses there weren't any men and there was production work to be done, so that hiring was important and women would be needed. But the warehouses did not work the twenty-four hour day as the shipyards did. So I imagine that some of the women who were not in a position to work a graveyard shift would go to the warehouse industry then. Of course most of the jobs they were doing would be the so-called men's jobs. That's because that's mainly why they would be hired. The women's jobs weren't really too much affected.

Ken: Did you ever discuss the different between the shipyard union's treatment of women and the treatment of women in Local 6?

Powell: No. In certain ways I would imagine that although the treatment of women in Local 6 was not ideal by any stretch of the imagination that it would be superior to that of the shipyards.

Ken: Why?

Powell: Because of - there was really a certain amount of democracy in the Warehouse Union - unusual democracy compared to other unions in the area.

Ken: Helene, this is sort of disjointed because as I transscribed your interview I thought of some questions I should have asked. I want to find out a little bit about your private life. What about your old friends, the ones you went to college with, did you keep in contact with them after you were active in the union?

Powell: Some of my friends did not go to the same college. I had one friend as a teen ager with whom I remained friendly and saw from time to time, and am still in touch with now.

Ken: I was thinking of this whole corps of kids that your mother and father brought you to San Francisco to be with.

Powell: Yes. You see they weren't all in college with me. Yes, as long as I was here I did participate in many, again, social events, and dating. This kind of thing. But it was more on a social basis because they certainly weren't interested in trade unionism or anything of that nature. Then when I went to Los Angeles and came back, then I did not re establish these ties, or they did not re establish the ties with me, whatever way you want to look at it. But I was sort of out of the social swing then. I would be involved at weddings and baptisms and this kind of thing. That's always gone on in my life to this day. But not the parties.

Ken: When your sister got married (and she was younger than you were) how did your mother feel about this - that you were the older sister and you were not married yet?

Powell: I think she was happy about my sister's marriage.

Ken: Did she ever discuss with you why you didn't get married?

Powell: Not really. She just presumed it would happen eventually. But it wasn't a big concern of hers. I mean she knew I was able to take care of myself financially. She certainly wouldn't want me to marry the wrong man, a poor marriage. She let me live my life pretty much the way I wanted to live it. I nevergot this business, "why don't you get married? You are going to be an old maid". Never, never.

Ken: There's another question. Why didn't you ever run for a full time job in the union?

Powell: I was fairly new in the union at that time, and never thought about it. With my experience as an organizer, I did learn a lesson - that you really shouldn't do anything unless you are an elected official.

Ken: What do you mean by that?

Powell: You have the support of the membership then.

Powell: It is the membership that makes the decisions. If they don't like the kind of work you are doing, then they don't re-elect you, and I just think it's superior to being appointed.

Ken: But then you were in the union for quite a long time - until 1948?

Powell: Oh, you mean later on.

Ken: Yes, or any time.

Powell: Well, in one sense I was disenchanted when I came back from Los Angeles as far as officialdom went - that, I don't know, there was a game being played and it just never did intrigue me.

Ken: Well, what diappointed you?

Powell: Oh, some of the things that I mentioned earlier. Possibly a lack of integrity. I don't mean that some officials were liars. I am not saying that. But that on a principled basis wherein that kind of a union which, as I say, was a democratic union that they could not see the forest for the trees - this kind of thing. This move to try to maintain the By-Law or whatever it was that a worker had to work one year in the industry in order to get his black book, and the black book meant a regular full member of the union, was just - I thought it very dishonest really. The ones it was going to affect more than anybody else was the Blacks coming into the union. Many employers were very discriminatory in that they were prejudiced, so it was to their benefit not to have Blacks become members of the unions because they didn't like Blacks. And there would always be some white workers who didn't either, and the employers could always use them as an excuse that the white workers did not want to work with the Black workers, so forthr and so on, and the leadership should have seen through that, and they probably did. But it was more convenient not to make a big issue over it and fight this kind of thing, although the rank and file defeated them.

Ken: How did the officials react? When you had the

Ken: fight on the floor, tell me a little bit about it.

Powell: I don't recall too much, really.. It was a local 6 meeting. However one of the vice-presidents of the International was present on the stage and made a personal attack against me in speaking against the motion that was on the floor, the motion being to have three months probationary period in order to receive a black book instead of one year. Butmany people spoke up, and the rank and file overwhelmingly voted the three month provision. So there was nothing they could do, really. It was just a defeat for them, and that kind of - which I believe was short sighted thinking.

Ken: Were they starting already to be worriedabout what would happen after the war/ Do you think that meant anything?

Powell: Well, I don't remember the date. It could have been after the war. In fact I think it was after the war. And their thinking could have been that way.

Ken: Then women were involved too?

Powell: Oh, yes.

Kendall: Both Blacks and women?

Powell: Right.

Ken: I see. Here's another general question. There was a theory advanced during the war that women were not good union members because they didn't participate in the building of the unions, they didn't know about unions, and they just joined, was this true in the warehouse Union?

Powell: Certainly not. There were just all kinds of women who were extremely active on all levels of the union exceptas officials.

Ken: Why do you think that theory was advanced then?

Powell: I think there was real bias against women. One could see it on the job. There was this whole deal about women even being on jobs where men

Powell: worked. Everyone knew the war would end eventually. And the mens' concern was, where would these jobs go. What about the veterans coming home. What jobs would they be able to get. These women should be at home. They shouldn't be working. This was always prevalent, this kind of thinking, and many men were quite open about it. They would come right out and tell you that you were taking a job away from a man. It had nothing to do with the fact of your marital status, of your family needs. There were many widows, divorcees, single women who had to work in order to eat. They never gave that a consideration. You could always get married and have a man work to support you. They were very, very backward in their thinking, the men members of that union. And I imagine that they were just - that it was the same all over the country.

Ken: Was anything done on the part of the union or the women in the leadership to create a better relationship then?

Powell: Well, I think a lot of the women themselves on the job did a very effective job in trying to overcome thisfeeling on the part of many men, and succeeded. I think some men changed their points of view and saw that women were really doing as good a job if not better in some instances than men were.

Ken: There were convention policies, but I never found any one equal rights for women. Did they ever have a platform in the union for equal rights for women?

Powell: I never recalled one. No, I don't think that question was ever raised. What was raised was that you got the same pay when you were on a man's job as a man. That's about as far as it went. Never equal rights for women to my recall.

Ken: In the transition from war to peace Mabel Keesling wrote an article. I read it in the Dispatcher. I will quote it now. "We have discovered attempts to cease upgrading women and Negroes and to write off these minority workers.." Did you have any experience on this?

Powell: Well, I would agree with the statement. Factually the women and the Blacks almost just disappeared from all these jobs after the end of the war. There were some in some houses, of course. All of a sudden the women were gone from the men's jobs - basically I mean. There weren't as many Blacks as there had been before. This kind of thing.

Ken: Were they laid off in accordance with seniority?

Powell: Not necessarily. I recall one case at Woolworth's where, as I recall, many of the women on the men's jobs were laid off out of seniority. They had greater seniority than the men who replaced them. And the union leadership put up pretically no fight at all. It would have been an easy victory on a seniority rights basis. That's why I am pretty sure I am correct, because I remember it. And I think that must have happened all over. And this was a group of women who demanded that a fight be made to retain their jobs because they did have greater seniority than the men who were replacing them. So I would imagine in other houses where women had greater seniority than men they just didn't want to make a fight about it, and forgot about it, and were overcome by some of these arguments, "well the men have come back now.." If it were the same men, of course, that was an entirely different story. I am not talking about a worker who left one specific house and then went to the war, and then came back. His seniority rode. His war service counted as seniority time. So I am not talking about returning veterans to their same job, but just other men.

Ken: Somewhere sombbody told me there was talk of the officials just wanting women to turn in their black books.

powell: I never heard that. This could have been a secret thought. I certainly never heard it expressed openly. I know that they would be very glad to

Powell: to get rid of all the women because of the feeling of the male members of the union who were numerically greater than the women. So those are votes you are talking about, and re-election of the male officials to their jobs. This kind of thing. This is what I mean by disenchantment. You know, you are always looking to be re-elected so that you change some of your principles in order to be re-elected, in order not to have to go back and work in a warehouse.

Ken: You said a group of women made a fuss. How did they make a fuss?

Powell: They went to the union. They got a business agent. Theoretically they got a business agent who went out to see the employer on it - had meetings - this kind of thing - but nothing ever came of it. All these women lost their jobs. And it was one of those things. There were still further steps that could have been taken. If the union had wanted to win that case they could have won it.

Ken: There is one more question I want to ask about the women in the union. Was there any difference in the women who were in the union before the war and the women who came in after the war? Was there any difference in their approach to unionism?

Powell: Well, I don't know, really. The women - basically the women in the union before the war, the vast majority were not extremely active union members. There was a large group that was very active in the affairs of the union and functions of the union. But the majority were not. They would go to a union meeting once a month because if they didn't they would have to pay a fine. But they really weren't affected. After the war there was a difference in my opinion because so many - I mean during the war. During the war there was a change because so many women went on men's jobs, and that changed their attitude about many things. And the so-called

Powell: women's jobs that just kept one in bondage in a sense - the belt line routine day in and day out. Whereas in the so-called men's jobs there was tremendous movement. You not only sat by the women on the belt, but you were circulating all around, talking to all kinds of people including management because there was a great deal of interchange with the clerical people in regard to the work that was going on in the warehouse that affected the mens jobs. There wasn't any such exchange on these belt line jobs. There was a difference there I think. The women were more alert who were on the men's jobs. When they started the men's jobs they were through the process of evolution being on the men's jobs. A sort of liberation would be the word one would use nowadays, but it wasn't exactly that. A greater appreciation of one's worth and ability. This kind of thing is what I mean.

Ken: When there were no calls for women hanging around the hiring hall, could an employer say he wanted a woman instead of a man, or a man instead of a woman? Or did the union determine that?

Powell: Theoretically an employer, as I recall, had a choice of the first three employees that the hiring hall sent him. The employer didn't have much of a leg to stand on if the first three happened to be women. He was stuck, but of course he always had the little games he could play legally also. He could let that woman go at the end of the first day and put in another call.

Ken: I am trying to find out now how the dispatch system worked after the war. Were the women plugged into the same board as the men were plugged into?

Powell: I don't remember on that. They must have been. There must have been a board for the so-called men's jobs and another board for the so-called women's jobs.

Ken: Could, after the war, a woman plug into the men's job board?

Powell: I would think, and this is strictly recall, that

Powell: she must have been able to plug into the men's job board.

Ken: On the basis of being out of work the longest she would be called then first?

Powell: Well, the way it was supposed to work was where the plug was in the board. Theoretically first come, first served. If a person got laid off and decided not to work for a month and didn't do anything about plugging in that month wouldn't count at all toward being called on a job.

Ken: You were still working at the tine, after the war?

Powell: Yes.

Ken: Were you still on a man's job?

Powell: Yes, I always stayed on a man's job until I left the union.

Ken: How many other women were able to do that?

Powell: Not many, not many. That's what I've been saying. And with mine, it was strictly coincidental - coincidentally where I worked my job was maintained. I had lost my job at Woolworths. I was one of those women who did have greater seniority, but then did get dispatched to another man's job.

Ken: In 1946 I think there was a new dispatch system that was more democratic. They said the number and type of job is now open to both men and women, and a woman has a right to plug in on a man's job if she thinks she can do the work. So there must have been some effective fight on the floor for this. I'm guessing.

Powell: I would presume, but I don't remember.

Ken: Who determined the difference between a men's job and a women's job?

Powell: It had been historical. The men's jobs were freight handlers, packers, order fillers, receiving clerks, and shipping clerks, and the womensjobs usually were belt line jobs.

Ken: There was this union program of "tightening up". What did that mean?

Powell: I don't remember the term at all.

Ken: Well, let me ask this question. Did this no strike policy of the union and this fighting, and all out

Ken: war effort weaken the union for job action? Or for getting things for people after the war?

Powell: Second side -

I don't think so. After the war there were strikes. And on a local house basis, during the war and after the war, there still was a strong steward system, grievance committee system. In my personal point of view I don't think it affected the union adversely.

Ken: You were re-elected to the executive board about the time of the longshore strike. Were you connected to that strike in any way?

Powell: Not personally. There might have been things like participating in a vote to give help to the longshoremen, this kind of thing. That would be the extent of it.

Ken: What was the attitude of the men toward the women who were still on the job? - since there were so few of you, comparatively?

Powell: Well, at Woolworth's, of course, it was very bad. But at this place where I wound up, Mangrum, Holbrook and Elkus, there were only two women there. And for the men, there might have been about six men. It was considered a very small house. And you actually became a family. And you would have your little beefs as any family would. There it was more one of acceptance. Maybe because that group of men figured well, it was a lost cause. But there wasn't any personal antagonism whatsoever. But basically, as I said before, women just disappeared from men's jobs. All of a sudden there weren't any women on these jobs where there had been hundreds during wartime.

Ken: Did you go to the 1927 convention?

Powell: Was that in Los Angeles?

Ken: I think so. Yes.

Powell: I might have.

Ken: I was wondering, because at that convention there was a platform calling for equal pay for equal work.

Ken: Pointing out the fact that women had to raise families, etc.

Powell: I don't think I did go, come to think of it.

Ken; When there was a platform at a convention, who made up the platform?

Powell: I suppose it would come from, at least with some aid, from the executive committee, but I really don't know on that one. I never played a role in a convention to my knowledge. Some of these things would emerge from union meetings. At least a platform would be presented. And that probably would have come originally from the executive board.

Ken: Were you ever involved in any activity while you were on the executive board for women's rights in the union?

Powell: Not per se. I don't recall anything for women's rights other than this whole matter of women going out on men's jobs, getting the support of the union for that. I remember this whole business when the war ended and women started to leave these jobs, men's jobs, for one reason or another. But that's my only recall of any kind of real fight for women. And it was never called "women's rights".

Ken: What was it called?

Powell: I don't remember. It might have been something like job security. There certainly wasn't any interest in working for the protection of women's rights, jobs, or anything else per se. They were just like anybody else.

Ken: Were you involved in this 1947 strike. I think it was a two day strike.

Powell: Yes. I would have been. I just remember the picket lines and closing the plants down and it was considered successful. The whole strike process was gone through. The community of San Francisco had been prepared for it by the local union. Basically it was a strike for more wages; that with the inflation people couldn't buy groceries as they had in the past.

Powell: pay the rent, and as you said it was a quickie and considered a successful strike.

Ken: There were a lot of parades. Did you participate in them much - Labor Day -

Powell: All of them. All the Labor Day parades I was in.

Ken. What was your reaction to the Taft Hartley Law?

Powell: Well, I remember what it did, to change that local. Because under the Taft Hartley Law unions could no longer fine members for not going to union meetings. And that made all the difference in the world. Of course by that time too we had the advent of television. It was a new thing then. So that very few people would go to union meetings, and this changed the whole complex of Local 6 where before there would be 4000 members at one meeting, 6000 members at one meeting, and even though many of those people were there under compulsion, meaning that they did not want to pay a fine, and that that's wh y they went, these meetings were so democratically run anybody could get up and speak on a motion pro or con. so that many people, just scores and scores of people, would speak at one meeting. These meetings would be held, for instance, at the civic auditorium, and the place would just be packed and jammed, and the nature of the meetings would hold people's interest. So that in a sense they became educational because people really saw democracy in action. And after Taft Harley that just disappeared totally. Smaller places had to be found for union meetings and members did not come. And, as I say, TV was involved possibly. And members were older and more tired after a day's work and didn't feel like going out at night. But it did change for the worst. The Taft Hartley eliminated this huge number of members actively participating in their own union. Even though, on the other hand, you had this semi-compulsory situation where before Taft Hartley these members basically went in order to avoid

Powell: paying a fine, but what they got was very good. First they got the knowledge of what was happening in their union and were able to be a part of the decision making process. If they didn't like anything they could vote against it right then and there. So this wound up then with the Taft Hartley meaning that very few people were making very important decisions for thousands of people.

Ken: I found out that you ran for Executive Board and got the third highest vote, and I was going to ask you how, and I remember you answered that. As an ExecutiveBoard member, were you involved in the Sears strike?

Powell: I was active to the extent of picketing on Saturdays. There were huge picket lines, hundreds and hundreds of people just encircling Sears in the Mission district.

Ken: Was that a retail clerks strike or what?

Powell: No. It was a warehouse strike. They didn't have that many warehousemen, but it was a situation where Sears was trying to eliminate the Local 6 Union, and Sears won that one. It was a peculiar situation. Some of the local 6 warehouse members there were goldbricking, and in a sense taking advantage of the employer, not really giving a day's work for a day's pay. And this permitted Sears to come in with a wedge. I forget the other side of the coin - whether the Teamsters were involved for those jobs. But as I recall Local 6 lost that strike and lost those jobs.

Ken: You said the picket lines were masspicket lines?

Powell: Oh yes.

Ken: Why was there such a mass activity on the part of the union? Did this happen in other strikes too?

Powell: Not at that time. I imagine that the union foresaw that there was going to be a loss of membership in many houses; that many houses would be leaving the San Francisco area, usually because of the higher wages that were demanded in San Francisco. And probably it was an old, old contract with Sears people in the union for a long, ong time. This

Powell: was probably all involved too.

Ken: What were the picket lines like on Saturdays?

Powell: Well, friendly, lots of fun. Lots of support from the public - jovial.

Ken: How many people would come out on Saturdays?

Powell: Oh, hundreds, just hundreds.

Ken: Was it a voluntary thing?

Powell: Oh, yes. Everything in Local 6 was always voluntary. It is one of the few unions where strikers received no strike pay. The officials at the time of the strike received no salary.

Ken: That's interesting.

Powell: It is interesting when you look at other unions in the area.

Ken: Then there was another strike in 1948. It was a longer strike - two weeks.

Powell:= Right. I had left the industry then, I think.

Ken: Were you in the union at the time of the Wallce for president campaign?

Powell: I don't think I was. When was that.

Ken: 1947, I guess, because the election would have been in 1948.

Powell: Well, I was in the union in 1947.

Ken: Were you active in that campaign in any way?

Powell: To a degree. I voted for Henry Wallace. And I always liked Henry Wallace as a Vice-President. I lost my respect for him in later years. I guess that was in the Korea police action where he made a speech with the tones, the implication of my country right of wrong. And that was a disappointment to me with Wallace. I had really liked Wallace as a Vice-President of the United States. Of course understanding that Roosevelt would let him make all the kinds of speeches he made, particularly theCommon Man theme. Those were the speeches I enjoyed, theCommon Man speeches. Because Roosevelt could then say, that's the Vice-President, and he could still accept the glory but never the responsibility. And I had met Wallace, not on a very personal basis. I don't mean that. But when I was an organizer in Los

Powell: Angeles, in the 1944 Presidential election he came out West to campaign for Roosevelt, and met with different labor groups. So on that basis I met him.

Ken: Well, the Local got a tremendous number of signatures. Were you active in the signature campaign?

Powell: I don't remember.

Ken: I wondered because you were interested in politics before. When did you leave the industry?

Powell: It was in 1948.

Ken: And why did you leave it then?

Powell: This place where I was working was sold, and I don't believe they dook any of the employees of the warehouse where I was working. I don't think they took anyone. They didn't hire anyone either. They already had enough employees to handle the place. And this place where I was working just shut down, just shut down completely. And the building was sold to somebody else, and it wasn't a warehouse any longer. And at that time, just before this happened, Western Sugar closed down, and there were five hundred women on the plug board. So I realized that there would be absolutely no chance of getting a job immediately. You know, that would be a long, long time. All those women would have to go out ahead of me. So there wasn't any point in staying around.

Ken: And were you a member of the Executive Board then?

Powell; I don't know. I don't remember.whether I was or wasn't.

Ken: Were there many women left in the union when you left?

Powell: Oh, many of the women who had been in the union when I became a member had gone; many of the women who had been very active. There were still women left, however.

Ken: Did you maintain your book in the union after had had left? How do you go about that?

Powell: I maintained it for a few years. I would say maybe three or four years. And I forget Local 6's withdrawal policies. But I know I didn't care for them because eventually - by maintaining my book I paid my dues fully all the time. Then, when I finally decided,

Powell: I am not going to be in the warehouse industry any longer, then I took out a withdrawal. And their withdrawal system must be peculiar because ever since withdrawal I never received another word from the union. Where I would think a member who withdraws, somehow or other, maybe there should be a very low dues payment,for members who have withdrawn, something of that nature, constantly til death receive the union newspaper, if desired, just to sort of keep in touch if nothing else. But that never happened.

Ken: You still feel, even after all these years, an attachment to the local?

Powell: Yes. I enjoyed participation in it, and I enjoyed the experience. And It was, you know, a certain part of my life.

Ken: How do you feel you made a contribution that way in the Local? I mean, does it still mean something to you?

Powell: As far as making a contribution? Well, I don't know how much contribution I think I made. Wherever I worked I think I made contribution on job conditions for everyone, grievance procedures, this kind of thing, following through, making the contract work, which is very important because no matter how good the contract is if you don't do something to enforce it it just winds up being a piece of paper. So that would be a contribution that many, many, many union members have made on the job, of seeing that the contract was always enforced. Other contributions could be to a degree I always argued for support of women and participation of women. I think I was involved in a limited degree to getting meetings of men and women together, of helping to eliminate the women's section as such and making the membership one section, men and women, regardless of sex. That would be the extent of it probably.

Ken: Oh, yes. In Hazel's column, Hot Cargo, she mentioned

Ken: that several waitresses and clerks came by a picket line; that you got them to come by and wish them luck--remember that?

Powell: No, I don't.

Ken: Well, you must have had a connection with the Local after you left.

Powell: Another contribution, again on a limited basis, would be one thing thatI and other women did throughout the years there - was constantly trying to get the differential between men and women's wages decreased - the differential between the pay for men's jobs and women's jobs. And I think throughthe years that that differential did improve for women on the belt jobs. And in the beginning, when I first went in there, say '41, the officials would deliberately settle the strike for less money for women than for men, and that improved during the years, that they did not do that any more, and that gradually the differential was decreased.

Ken: Does it still exist, I wonder?

Powell: I don't know. I imagine that it still exists, on the historical basis of the job itself, though I think the [illegible] union never dares today to sell the women down the river in a strike situation by settling for less for them than they do for the men.

Ken: You mean in across the board increase, yo would have to get more for the women?

Powell: Yes. Right.

Ken: Have your experiences in the local affected the rest of your life in any way?

Powell: Oh, so indirectly. They made me as an individual know that no matter where I was that I had rights, that that I should always be able to speak up to them. And in an office job that I had there was a strange management where they would never voluntarily give raises. So every year I would wait, one year for about two weeks after, to see if there was going to be a raise on my check. And there never was. So then I would go into the office manager and say I

Powell: wanted a raise. And I always got the raise. There was another woman there who was much more skilled than I. She was a draftsman (draftsperson I guess you would call it nowadays). She never went in. She never got a raise. She would always say, "A Lady does not ask for a raise." Well, that was something I had learned, that has stayed with me all my life. Not the same thing as asking for a raise or anything, but just always not being afraid to speak out. That was probably part of it, althought I don't know. I may have had that before I even went in. But this kind of thing.

Ken: These are sporadic questions. Did you ever feel there was a stigma attached to you because you weren't married?

Powell: Oh, possibly, possibly.

Ken: Why?

Powell: I don't know why. I am just trying to see if I can think of anything. I think it was maybe for a certain period of time, say until I was thirty. I am just guessing, you know that at that time you were supposed to be married, I think, by thirty. And that after that it just sort of died down. I will say this. I do remember certain times before thirty the question was, "when are you going to get married?" I don't know if I would call it a stigma, but there was something there.

Ken: Well, it was an acceptable thing during that period, and I wondered how you would deal with it. How did you deal with it?

Powell: Oh, I would say things like, which were true, that the right man hadn't come along. I really was very interested in equality in marriages, always. And that always was a determination for me. And some of the marriages I had seen - well, in my own family, all the women in every part of my family going back to grandparents, parents, aunts, etc., every single one of the women in my family had been the type where they made the marriage work. And they were strictly, even though many of them were

Powell: very bright, they were strictly the kind that did all the shopping, all the cooking, all the housework, Other than my father who did do a lot of the cooking and all that, and the chores; but that was not the kind of marriage I wanted. And even with Revels and his charm, and turning his charm on and all that sort of thing, with his first wife - I first lived with them in Los Angeles and we had that chart up, he took a terrible beating from many of the men who said that he was undermining their position in their families. They would come over and in the kitchen they would see this big wall chart, "Revels - dishes -

end of tape 8

Tape #9 - Saturday, ~~February~~ January 29, 1977

Powell: They would come in the kitchen and they would see this big wall chart, "Revels, dishes Monday, Shopping Tuesday, Cooking Wednesday" and then his first wife's name and my name would be down for other days of the week, and it just shocked most of these men that he would dare do any of the household chores. And of course Revels didn't like it one iota from beginning to end, but we were very insistent. The three of us were working long hours every day, and we were tired. He did do it. I really admired him for it, and I liked it. And other marriages I had seen comparable to that. And I just liked the sharing of work when both spouses worked every day. It was a little different if one didn't work. I had no objection to that. But if both spouses worked I really thought all work should be shared. So that was really part of my feeling. Also I thought that, even to this day, that in many of the marriages I know the wife is more intelligent than the husband, but has to make believe that she is not as intelligent. And I don't see why this competition should be going on. I really don't. But now it is much more acceptable not to have to get married. I have even known women who have gotten married just to get married. Then divorced, so that there would be no stigma attached to them. They were now divorcees. (Phone rings)

Ken: If you had it to do over again, would do anything differently with your life?

Powell: Basically, no. Although if my life had been different I still would have liked to have best been a lawyer. And it would have been a little bit more elevated than my childish thoughts about it as "attorney for the defense". But I would have been interested at one time in being a lawyer, a labor lawyer; and then later on a civil rights lawyer. But again, god knows if I had financially been able to afford a law school

Powell: education what the role of a woman lawyer being a trial lawyer and practicing would have been. I am sure most of the women attorneys my age would have been stuck in research for other attorneys. But I have enjoyed my life. And looking back on it there is really nothing I would have changed. I have liked each experience, and each experience has helped me in other facets of my life to some degree.

Ken: Well, what would you say was the best and most satisfying part of your life, up to 1948, say because the rest of it we haven't gone into.

Powell: College. It just opened up a whole new world to me. It wasn't just the courses at all, but the university life - starting to think = starting not to accept everything, take everything for granted, but to think thxings through. Then it opened up this whole world of classical music to me. Just because I was at Cal. and there was Pierre Monteaux the conductor of the San Francisco Symphony had started a program (I forget what it was) - it was something for college students at very reduced prices. Starting to go to operas. We only went for standing room. It was a dollar in those days. And it just opened up this whole field of cultural events to me. And reading in many, many fields. That would be because of the general education courses of the University. But that was certainly - and youth at that time - discovery.

Ken: I don't remember whether I asked this question or not. Whom did you most admire when you were a young person?

Powell: Well, in what sense?

Ken: Among the people you knew, who did you look up to the most?

Powell: Well, I would guess my family was always the most important to me - my mother, my aunt, my great aunt, my uncle by marriage, my great uncle by marriage when he was living. They were really the people I looked up to the most.

Ken: Why?

Powell: They were all very good people. They really were. I don't know what were the exact qualities. Of course there was this tremendous love. I will say that. It always came through - the love - you know from babyhood on. And there was respect also for the individual. But they were just - if they weren't my family whatsoever, they were very good people. They would have been good if there were no relationship whatsoever. Just good human beings as I imagine most people are in the world, really. But they were strong characters. That would be another factor. Each of these people was strong although not necessarily on the surface. Within I mean. Good strong characters. They all had good characters.

Ken: What qualities do you think they instilled in you?

Powell: I'm telling you. I remember very specifically being instilled, whether it was the right way or the wrong way, with the qualities of honesty. Never interfering in other people's privacy. Being, kind, generous. This kind of thing. But I don't know if I had mentioned it to you before. I new my mother was waiting for a letter from someone, and the letter came, and I opened it and read it and phoned her at work, and read it to her. Well she couldn't do anything over the phone at work. But when she came home, did she ever give me a ledture! That in the first place it is a criminal offense to interfere with anyone's mail, and that I was never the rest of my life to ever open a letter that was not addressed to me. And my mother was this very sweet woman. When she spoke to me in those tones it really took, and I never did open a letter again in my life that was not addressed to me. Things of this nature, you know was the way that some of these things were done. You can see that I remember that to this day.

When I was in high school in San Jose there was a huge girl who would always push me in my locker.

Powell: I was very sort and tiny. Between changing classes she just pushed me right into the locker all the time. So I decided I was going to get her one day. So I waited, and saw the time, and I just dashed - ran down the hall and pushed her. And she went into a door where the top half was glass. Well, the glass was broken. And I went right to the principal and said, "I pushed so and so, and broke the glass in the door." And my mother was galled down to the school, and said that she would pay for the glass. But it was that kind of honesty. I had been taught to be honest, so I did this - that kind of thing.

Ken: I can tie that in with your feeling of loss of integrity on the part of officials in the union.

How do you feel as to whether you realized your potential or not during your period in the union?

Powell: I think it could have been greater in the sense that I think all kinds of women in that union could have realized greater potential than they did if the leadership had really made an active decision to do something about it. They really didn't. They might be supportive, but they never took an active rolein helping women.

Ken: Why do you think women didn't push themselves forward more? - including yourself.

Powell: I think part of it would have been, first of all lack of experience and background. Most of the leadership had been in the union some years before. Secondly,as far as being an elected official, the men were certainly the numerical majority.

Ken: Was this true during the war too?

Powell: I don't think it would be. I would think the women would have been the numerical majority. But that would have been a factor. Then there were certain biases at that time against women. Even some women would have voted for men instead of voting for women. They might have rationalized it again, that the men had more experience, that the men were

Powell: better fighters. I think that was involved. Some of the leadership was excellent, and no one would want to run against excellent leadership. But it was pretty much a man's world in officialdom.

Ken: Well, there was one woman business agent - Mabel Keesling.

Powell: Yes. But this was all World War II. World War II changed many things as far as women were concerned. Not only in that union, but in all aspects throughout the country. And of course Mabel Keesling, even with her, she was appointed first, then elected. And that election was very, very close, and it took a tremendous amount of work for her to get elected.

Ken: Did you participate in that?

Powell: Oh, yes. I should say.

Ken: How?

Powell: Oh, I don't know. Just by lining up votes and talking people into voting for her, and going into her history in the union. It was - if she won, which she eventually did, it was going to be a tremendous victory for women just by having an elected woman business agent.for the first time.

Ken: How many women consciously participate in this election campaign?

Powell: I don't know how many. There were many. As far as numbers, say forty, fifty, I don't recall how many women participated in this.

Ken: Did you have a caucus?

Powell: No.No caucus.

Ken: So you did it on an dinvidual basis then?

Powell: Informal discussionshere and there, but no caucus of any kind.

Ken: Did any men campaign for her?

Powell: Yes, men campaigned for her also. And she was a very dedicated, hard working business agent, one of the best.

Ken: What friendships have you maintained over the years? You mentioned people you were still in contact with.

Powell: Well, I have maintained many friendships.from my youth.

Powell: all through my life, really, including, Local 6. Quite a few, all through my life.

Ken: What's the oldest friendship you hafe maintained?.

Powell: The oldest would be this woman in Oakland who was a friend of mine, and with her daughter, her first daughter, her first child, I was and am the godmother. And this was in an Episcopalian church. And even though I was not an Episcopalian they wanted me to be the godmother, so that would be the oldest contact I guess. I probably met her when I was about fifteen or sixteen.

Ken: What would you say the basic difference is today between a persoon who is eighteen or nineteen and the person you were when you were eighteen or nineteen?

Powell: Well, I think the eighteen year old today just has so much more knowledge about everything than I did. I don't think that - they are much more sophisticated. They are not isolated at all. They just know more about everything than the eighteen year olds in my day did, the world, subject matter, history, current events, science. Of course in all these fields like science there has been so much more knowledge available and new things in the fields. All our high school chemistry where we were in those days was the atom. And on the basis of my high school chemistry I was able to understand the atom bomb, the splitting of the atoms. But everything since that I don't have the scientific knowledge whatsoever, and these youngsters do nowadays. I would say knowledge, sophistication are the two big things. Also a certain self-assertiveness which might come with sophistication. Much greater self-assertiveness than eighteen year olds of my generation had.

Ken: Let's see now. There is this theory that minority women are doubly exploited, once as a minority, then again as a woman. What is your thinking on this?

Powell: Oh, I think this is true, not only on a personal basis, but on a historical basis. Absolutely.

Ken: Can you elaborate a little bit on this.

Powell: On my own personal experience, I don't know. I think that just being a woman that I would be denied many opportunities that would come to me if I had been a man. Historically of course with Black women it has always been the lowest job available. These things are changing today, but I am talking about before this women's liberation movement started. And even with women's liberation, although I believe in it, in the sense that women should be equal and should have the same rights and opportunities, I don't particularly like the thrust that it has taken in the United States. I read the Betty Frieden book the year it was published, and was very impressed with it. But my major criticism of it was that she was talking about white college women who got married and had children, and that they should re-enter the world of careers. And what about the working women and the poor women and the housewives? Nothing was said about them and practically nothing is said about them to this date. And I really dislike that very, very much in the whole women's liberation movement in the United States today. I think they are making a serious error. I think they are alienating many housewives. And they alienate working women. I am thinking particularly of women who work in factories and industrial plants. I think all their rhetoric is directed to college educated women who are such a minority in this country. And I think some of the rhetoric is great.- Equal pay for equal work, child care centers for working mothers free to the working mothers. That's fine, but that's about as far as they go. Everything else is this other talk to the professional woman kind of thing: - Don't be a volunteer in a hospital any more, become a doctor, this kind of thing.

Ken: As long as we are talking about this, what do you think of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Powell: I am in favor of it, although I know there has been opposition to it on the basis that women are going to lose some of the rights that they now enjoy as women. And I see that as a possibility. The way I would like to see the struggle go though is first of all that the Equal Rights Amendment passed, becomes an amendment to the Constitution, and that then all the rights that women have because they are women are given to the men. That's what I would like to see. And that's where I think the thrust of the fight should be - not that women lose and of the rights they had because they were women, but men gain those rights also. So I am in favor of it.

Ken: I think the Equal Rights Amendment now stems from the women's liberation movement. Do you feel the trade union women feel the same way about it? Do you think you are reflecting the opinion of trade union women?

Powell: Oh, I don't know. I've been so out of touch with trade union women I have absolutely no idea what trade union women are thinking about these days. I think I am so far away from the union movement now and disappointed with the trade union movement on the whole, with this bureaucracy trade unions have permitted themselves to build up with the very, very high salaries that I have mentioned before, this kind of thing. So I don't know on that. Thinking about it, I could see where some trade union women might be against it because of a fear that they would lose some of these rights that they had because we are women, such as adequate rest periods on a job, adequate facilities for even lying down, health facilities, for instance lifting heavy objects. So that theoritically I could see opposition of some trade union women, but I know nothing of what's going on on that question in the unions at all. I know nothing , neither with the men or the women in the trade unions.

Ken: This other question, maybe you can give me some

Kendall: thinking on it, is What do you think of the role of women in unions today as opposed to the role of women in union when you worked?

Powell: I don't think there has been ady advance. We always have had these unions where women were the members, the membership of the union, and by and large they have had women leadership, such as the Waitresses Union, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, these kinds of unions. But when you look at some of these international unions we read about in the press every day, the UnitedAutomobile Workers Union, the United Steelworkers Union, etc. you never see a woman official's name mentioned, always men. So I don't think there has been any improvement at all as far as leadership of women in unions goes.

Ken: Was there any time when it was either easier or harder for you to function because you were a woman?

Powell:= I can't specifically remember any instance. I was fortunate. Maybe to go back to one of your earlier questions about what were some of the things that I benefitted from by being in Local 6, but I was fortunate in being in Local 6 when women were admitted to men's jobs. And so basically that's been the pattern of my life, that I have always been on a job where women were equals to men to a degree. But in a sense my situation is unique to women, and it does go back to working on a man's job in Local 6.

Ken: I see, so that started a pattern almost, for you?

Powell: Yes.

Ken: Are you interested in any specific feminie issues today?

Powell: <u>Side two - tape 9</u>

I am certainly interested in this whole question of women's rights on a philosophical basis, and on a practical basis, meaning that I would like to see the fight won where women have the same rights as men in every capacity, jubs, education, housing,

Powell: marriage, anything that affects life I think somen should be as equal as men. I really am encouraged by many things that are happening, and I really think that men are benefitting tremendously from women receiving more rights. I mean it is strange now when I hear a man on the telephone giving me the weather, but I think it's great. And on the other side, having a woman take my money when I cross a toll bridge. And I haven't seen them in person, but I have seen the pictures in the newspapers of women climbing the telephone poles. And last month a woman P G & E employee came by to read the meter. All of these things have been happening, and I like the equality where men can now accept jobs that were only for women and women can accept jobs that were only for men in the past and not have any differential in wages, etc. I think we are only beginning this thing.

Ken: If the Equal Rights Amendment passes, do you think it will make a change?

Powell: I think that there will be even more impetus to keep improving, keep opening up fields that are still closed. And of course we come back to our friends, the trade unionists, who will probably be the biggest fighters against women really getting full rights, such as the Plumbers Union, the Electricians Union. They want to keep everybody out, all the minorities including women. So I think if the Equal Rights Amendment were passed that the gield could just keep opening up and up and up. You know it could go on for years yet before we really had won a battle.

Ken: I am thinking of the parallel when the womenfought for suffrage and won, the only thing left out of the whole mass of organization was the League of Women Voters. This was sort of elitist. You mentioned not a working women's organization. I was wondering what you would think about what would happen

Ken: if the Equal Right Amendment passed. Would you guess?

Powell: Well, if you look at it with a long perspective of many years, let's say looking back at women's voting rights, then I would think the victory would be much greater, and less hollow than the women's voting rights. I think women for all those years after they received the vote in this country were again voting the way their husbands were voting. And again it was this role of, perhaps unconsciously, subservience to the superior breadwinner. This kind of thinking. I think women now are beginning to see that they are, you know, people, and if the Equal Rights Amendment passes I think with a long perspective ahead (twenty years - thirty years) that there will just be all kinds of improvements, and that women will truly be thinking for themselves and living for themselves.

Ken: Let's see - 1919 to 1977 - fifty eight years, and the Equal Rights Amendment was started by Alice Paul around that time. So it took a long time for it to have a chance at passing.

There is just one more question - What do you think of this type of interview?

Powell: Well, I think it is interesting. I've been surprised myself at the number of things and events that have come to mind that certainly I wouldn't have thought about unless you had been questioning me about them and making me think back. At least your questions made me think back. And it has been interesting in that sense. Also in giving me a recall of my own life, who I am, where I am, etc. I've enjoyed it. And on the question of say, Local 6, or the ILWU, I think that if one is searching for a history there that an oral history is an interesting way of getting material. Where one person doesn't have all the answers or all the recall, that different people thinking about the same question might be able to recall different

Powell: details, and different events, and wind up with a fairly good history. And certainly on the whole question of oral histories, I've been very impressed with some that I have heard on the radio. I just think it is wonderful that they have these cassette tape recorders now, and that this kind of thing can be done. I have heard them on, oh eighty and ninety year old wives of miners. It is fascinating what these elderly people can recall, looking back many many years ago. It is just fascinating, and it is definitely an enriching part of history that would be totally lost. Not this specific interview of mine. I don't mean that. I mean the concept of oral histories I think is great.

Ken: In this particular interview, do you have any suggestions about how it could have been done better?

Powell: No. I really don't. I feel like a total lay person in this. And I think your questioning has been excellent, truly. I am not kidding. And I just don't see any better way. The only major criticism I have is of myself. I am very disgusted that I can't recall as many specific details as I would have liked to.

Ken: I find that I haven't been able to bring out what your personal reaction was to a lot of things. I wondered if it was because of me, or what.

Powell: Well, some of the things I really don't remember. For instance, on the terminology "women's rights" per se, I do not recall that terminology being employed in the union when I was involved in the union. Now maybe it was. I don't recall it. And I think that sometimes my lack of recall hampered you in some of the things you might have liked to have brought out.

Ken: I found you fairly reserved in your answers, and I wondered if it was because I didn't know you well enough or - I am groping for finding ways

Ken: of doing things better each time.

Powell: Part of that might be my own personality. Not that I am consciously reticent, but I always have tended to be a rather private person. This might be reflected in what you are saying. I don't know. It has been a unique experience for me, and I certainly have tried to be open.

Ken: OK. Well, thanks a lot. I guess I will just stop here.

(stopped tape and juststarted talking. Then Helene mentioned a letter she had written to Reyels when she lost her organizing job in Los Angeles) - turned on tape again -

Powell: It really should wait until I see if I can find this letter.

Ken: Whether you find the letter or not, you said when you were in Los Angeles you spoke -

Powell: Yes. It was Negro History Week - and it was a Black church. And during the course of my talk I read a speech that Sojourner Truth had made. And constantly, throughout the speech, she would say, "And Ain't I a woman?". And it would go on and on like that. "and ain't I a woman?" It was just fantastic. And the congregation was just overcome with this speech of Sojourner Truth's. But I was just recalling that. I don't know if I saved that or not.

Ken: You mean the speech of Sojourner Truth's?

Powell: Or mine, which incorporated it.

Ken: Yes. That would be great if you had that.

Powell: I will have to huht around in all the crannies.